Tuesday 25 November 2025

Amateur Photographer

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Sigma 135mm F1.4

The world's fastest 135mm AF lens delivers remarkable, unique images

iPhone 17 Pro

TESTED Is the new camera worth upgrading to?

USA vs Russia

A 14-year project challenges us to spot the difference

Solargraphs

Unusual images capturing the sun's passage across the sky

OM 50-200mm F2.8 IS Pro

Andrew Fusek Peters finds it to be three great lenses in one

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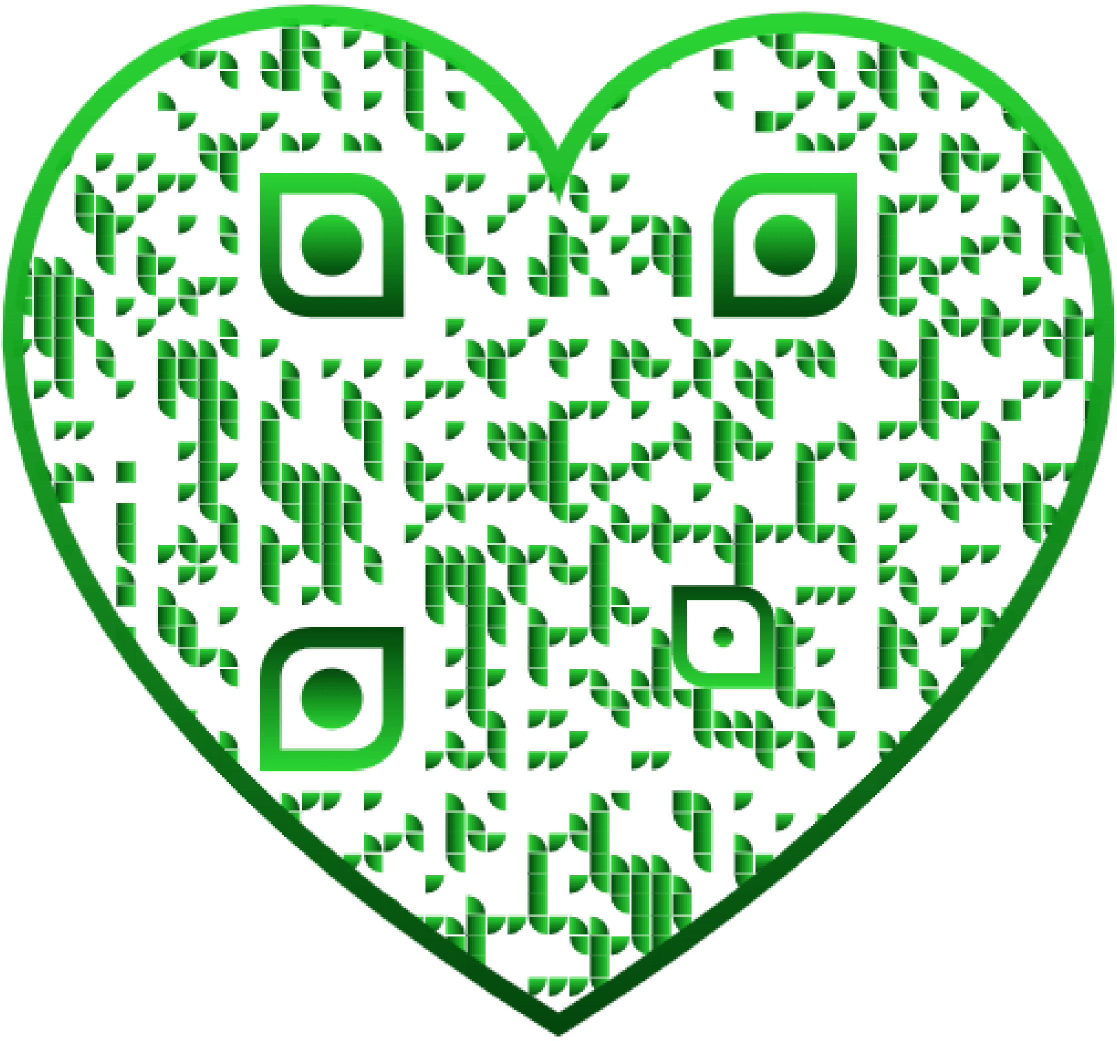
Plus Neewer CSF10 Fresnel lens attachment • The art of staying close to home



DOG
FUJIFILM

We know our cameras inside out.

Because we've checked every one.

Time to
change gear.

mpb

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THIS WEEK'S CONTRIBUTORS

AMY DAVIES
Features Editor

Smartphone expert Amy reveals her verdict on the iPhone 17 Pro camera

ANDREW FUSEK PETERS

In his field test, top pro Andrew checks out the new OM System 50-200mm F2.8 IS Pro

PETER DENCH
Acting Features Ed

Peter talks to a photographer whose project blurs expectations about the US and Russia

ANDY WESTLAKE
Technical Editor

Our resident expert on photo kit rounds up the best buy cameras and accessories

DAMIEN DEMOLDER

AP's former editor tests a Sigma prime lens and the Neewer CSF10 lighting modifier

GRAEME GREEN

AP regular and pro Graeme talks to Robert Charles Mann about his solargraphs with pinhole cameras

Welcome

Almost all of our readers now use a smartphone as their day-to-day camera, and almost half of these are iPhones. So the arrival of a new model is always of interest, especially with regard to changes to the camera. This week we test the new iPhone 17 Pro and ask whether it's worth the upgrade. We also test two great new lenses from Sigma and OM System, and a clever light modifier from Neewer. Our big feature this week is Seamus Murphy's insightful exploration of life in the USA and Russia, which highlights just how much more there is that unites than divides us. Don't forget to secure your ticket to our next Festival of Photography (see page 45) and vote for your favourite kit and retailers in our Readers' Choice Awards (page 24).

Nigel Atherton, Editor

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MAIN COVER PICTURE © AMY DAVIES. COVER INSET PICTURE, BELOW: ROBERT CHARLES MANN.
COVER INSET PICTURE, ABOVE: © SEAMUS MURPHY

Our cover image of Cardiff Castle was taken by Amy Davies on an Apple iPhone 17 Pro. Read her review on page 28

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See page 38 for our special Xmas offer

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The Leica Q3 Monochrom

Leica Q3 Monochrom lands

LEICA has announced the Q3 Monochrom, the second black & white-only camera in the company's Q range. As with Leica's previous mono cameras, it eschews colour filters over the image sensor's pixels. Instead it features a 60MP monochrome sensor, and captures images at resolutions of 60MP, 36MP and 18MP across an ISO range from 100 to 200,000. As with the standard Leica Q3, the new camera has a fixed Summilux 28 f/1.7 ASPH lens and records video with up to 8K resolution.

The Leica Q3 Monochrom also features a refreshed user interface, with colour coding used to separate photo and video functions. Leica said it will introduce this new operating concept for Q-cameras to both the Leica Q3 and the Leica Q3 43 through a firmware update at the end of the year. The Q3 Monochrom is also the first Q-series camera to enable users to add a digital signature compliant with the Content Authenticity Initiative (CAI), ensuring the tamper-proof verification of photographs.

As you'd expect from Leica, the Q3 Monochrom is a handsome-looking camera; the all-metal body and lens hood are finished in black, with engravings – such as the 'Monochrom' lettering on the top plate – rendered in black or grey. The absence of the iconic red Leica dot also accentuates the camera's minimalist design. Accessories include a handgrip with wireless charging and a coordinated leatherette covering, a red filter, and a selection of carrying straps.

The Leica Q3 Monochrom is available now from Leica stores and authorised dealers for £5,800.

Big Black Friday deals on DxO software

FRENCH software giant DxO has got in there early with Black Friday deals, offering significant discounts across all its products, including DxO PhotoLab, PureRAW, Nik Collection, FilmPack, and ViewPoint.

There are reductions of up to 50% on new purchases and upgrades, while 'Creator Discount Codes' will remain active during the campaign, giving an additional 5% off for new customers. The biggest discount is 50% off a new license for DxO ViewPoint, the company's tool for perspective and geometry correction, but there is also 23% off the highly acclaimed PureRAW raw-processing and denoising software. A new license for the Nik Collection, including the popular Silver Efex for black & white conversion, is discounted by 18% (22% with the discount code).

Existing users of PhotoLab and PureRAW can also cut the cost of upgrading to the latest version by 17%.

Full details are at dxo.com and you can see a whole lot more Black Friday deals on amateurphotographer.com

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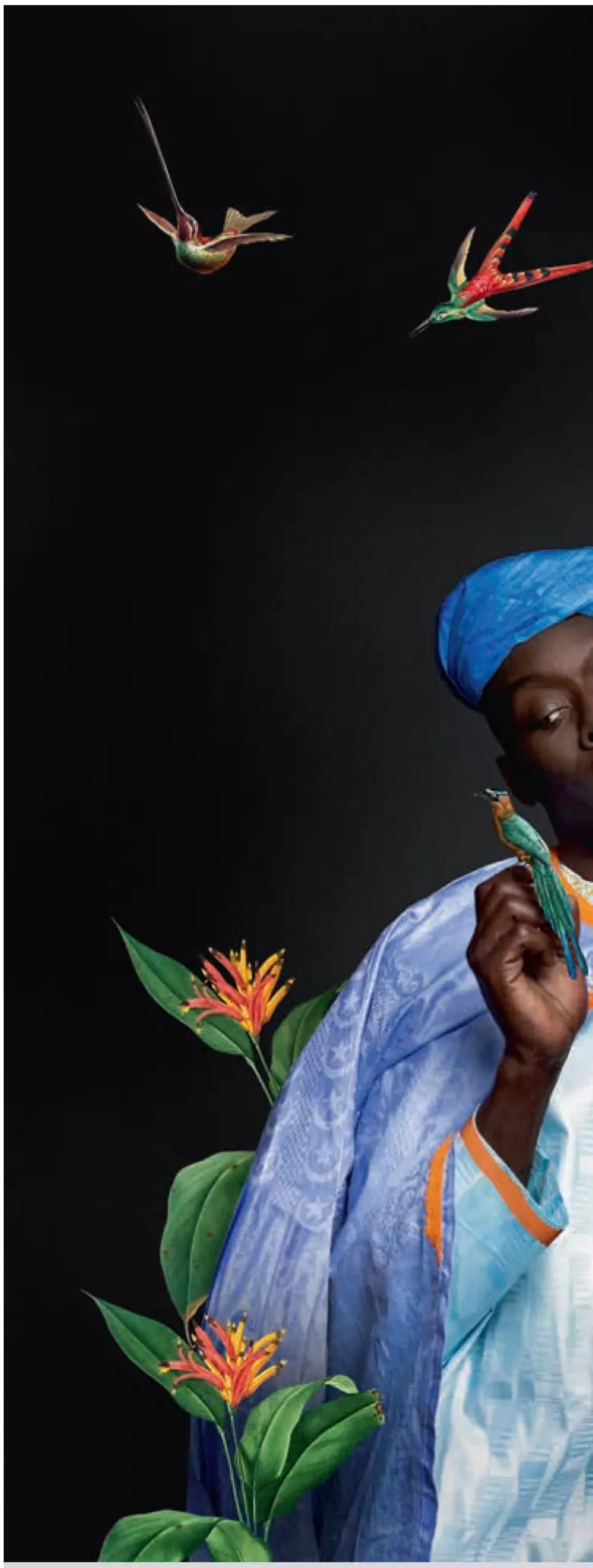
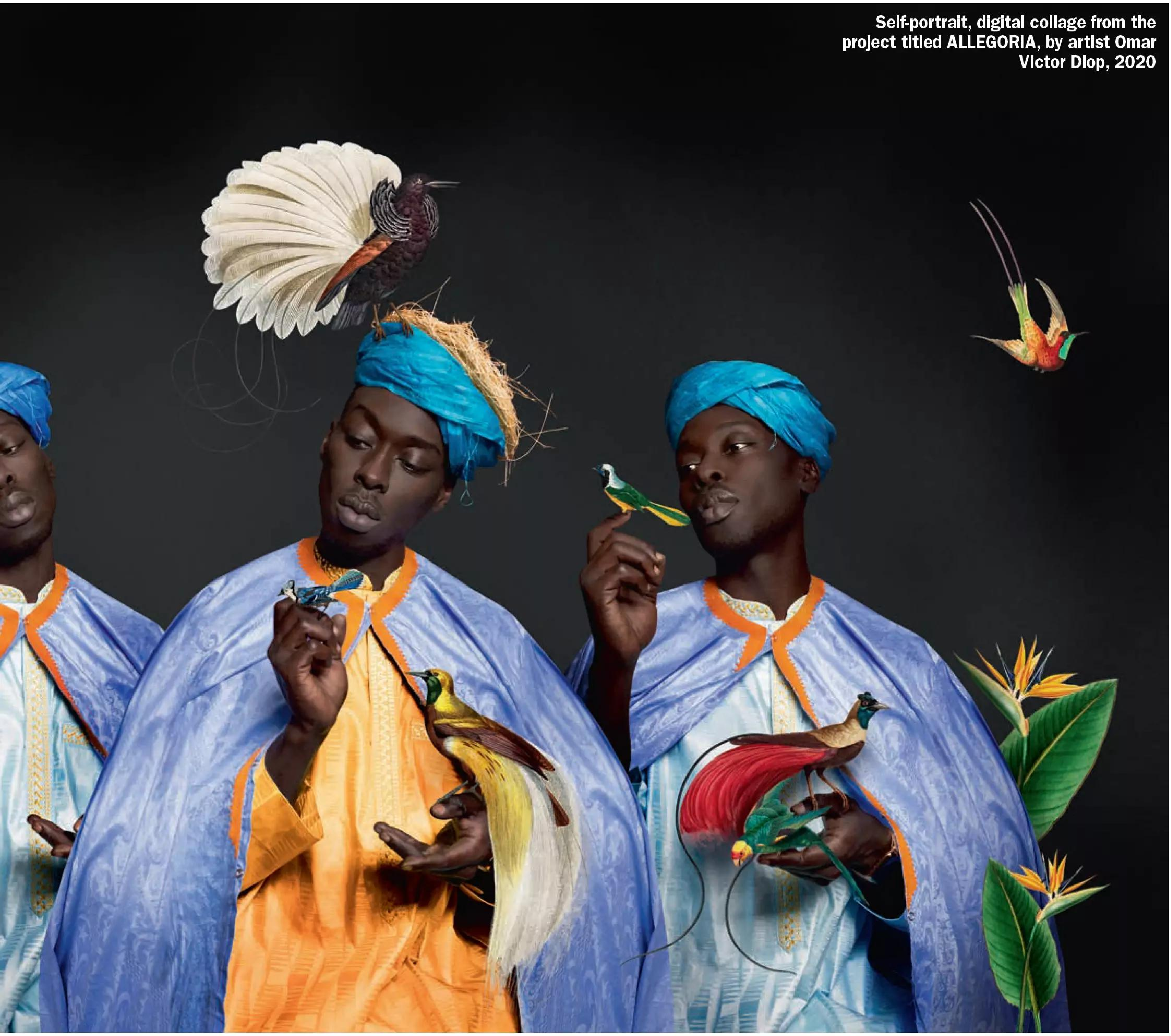


© OMAR VICTOR DIOP. COURTESY THE ROYAL PHOTOGRAPHIC SOCIETY

A well-deserved 'Victor'

SENEGALESE photographer Omar Victor Diop is the recipient of this year's RPS Award for Achievement in the Art of Photography. Working initially on landscapes, Diop then moved into fashion photography, while also focusing on fine art and self-portraiture as part of his personal work. Indeed, *Being There*, his collaboration with Lee Shulman, was named Book of the Year in this year's AP Awards (Diop inserted himself into old photos of white, segregated America). Meanwhile, the RPS Centenary Medal went to Susan Derges in recognition of her contribution to the art of photography. See the full list of recipients at rps.org



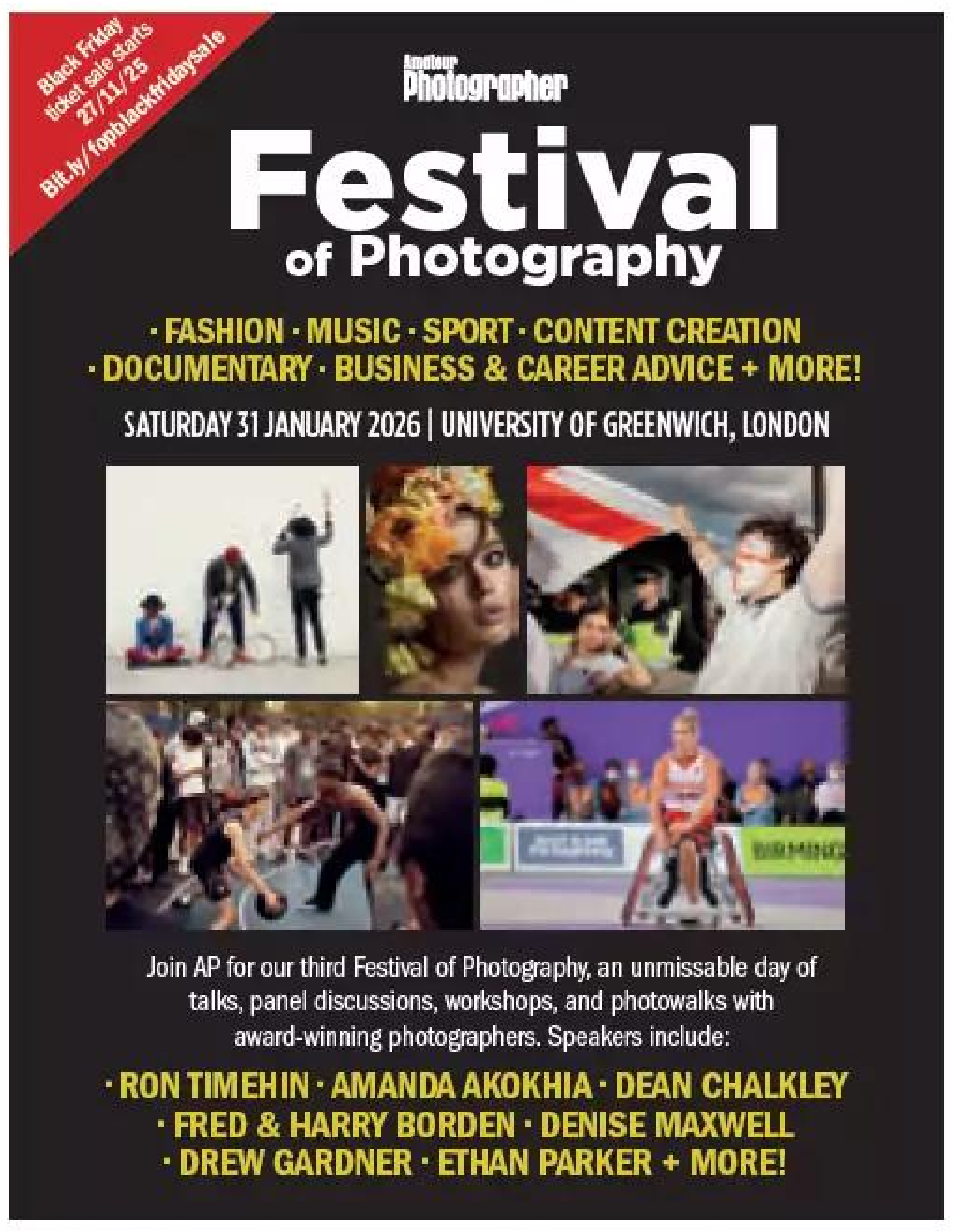
Self-portrait, digital collage from the project titled ALLEGORIA, by artist Omar Victor Diop, 2020

Black Friday deal on AP festival tickets

FROM 27 November, we are offering a special Black Friday discount on tickets to our next Festival of Photography, taking place at London's University of Greenwich on 31 January.

This unmissable event has a great line-up of speakers, including Harry Borden, Dean Chalkley, Drew Gardner, Denise Maxwell, Amanda Akokhia and more; there are also panel discussions on succeeding as a videographer and starting a career as a press photographer.

See Bit.ly/fopblackfridaysale



Black Friday ticket sale starts 27/11/25 Bit.ly/fopblackfridaysale

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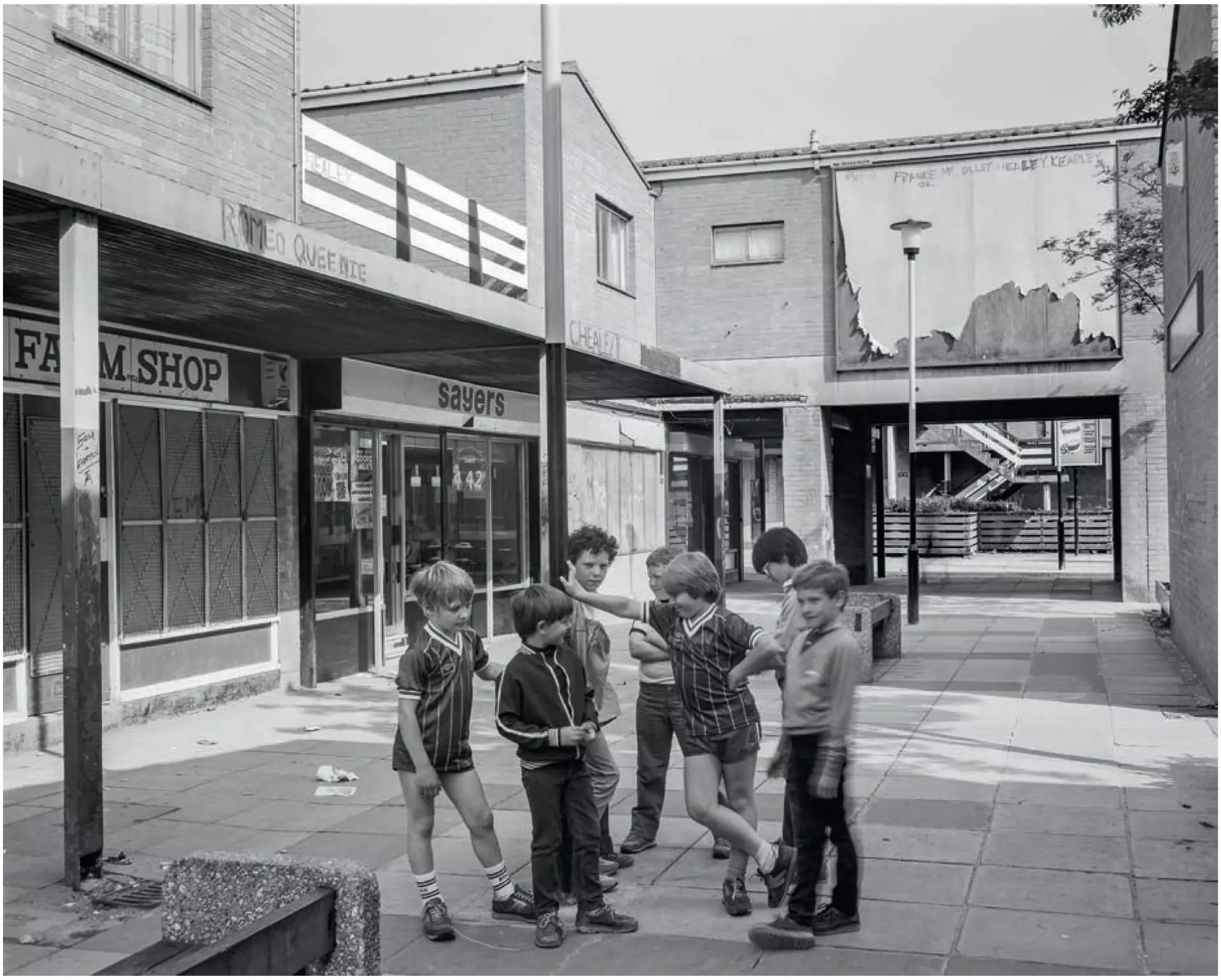
Don't miss your discount

DJI's action camera '6' appeal

DJI HAS announced the Osmo Action 6, the company's first action camera with variable aperture controls.

The Osmo Action 6 offers an aperture range of f/2 to f/4, which should help with low-light performance, and is equipped with a 1/1.1in square CMOS sensor. DJI claims this delivers up to 13.5 stops of dynamic range to capture crisp detail in high-contrast settings, while also delivering better results in low light. It also supports video recording up to 4K/120fps in 4:3 ratio, while a 4K Custom mode allows users to shoot first and crop later in post-production for various social media platforms. The Osmo Action 6 standard combo is on sale now for £329 from store.dji.com

The lens boasts a variable aperture



Clockwise from left: From Skelmersdale

From Housing Estates

From Personal Space

From Housing Estates

ALL IMAGES © STEPHEN MCCOY

Proximity

by Stephen McCoy

Martin Parr Foundation, Bristol, until 21 December

Stephen McCoy's quiet revelations of the everyday, show the art of staying close to home, says **Peter Dench**

For nearly half a century, Stephen McCoy has turned his lens on the overlooked corners of Merseyside – its housing estates, demolition sites, coastal landscapes, domestic interiors. Proximity, a retrospective at the Martin Parr Foundation, brings together these disparate series into a quietly revelatory show.

McCoy's early black & white work Housing Estates (1979-83) captures the stark geometry of Ainsdale's post-war housing stock. The images are angular, high contrast, playing with shadow and repetition. As the series evolved into colour typologies of near-identical bungalows, photographed under deliberately flat light, subtle variations emerge: shutters, garden ornaments, individual attempts at distinction. Social history told through front lawns.

Equally striking is Personal Space (1980-84), in which McCoy turns to the family home. These images – cropped tightly, sometimes playfully angled – show ordinary lives in moments of domestic comedy and tenderness. The humour is affectionate, and connects to later conceptual projects such as Archaeology of a Carpet (2003), where dust and detritus collected in a vacuum cleaner become a peculiar archaeological record.

River to River (1985-90), follows the coastline between the Mersey and the Ribble. Here McCoy's eye for landscapes in flux – at once industrial, coastal, and recreational – captures the shifting identity of a region caught between neglect and renewal. Similarly, his photographs of Skelmersdale in the 1980s offer a human counterpoint, documenting the daily lives of residents amid economic downturn and urban decay.

Curated originally by Liverpool's Open Eye Gallery, Proximity is an exhibition that feels overdue. McCoy has worked 'quietly and tirelessly for decades', as Martin Parr notes, and has often been overlooked. That raises a critical point: while the retrospective demonstrates McCoy's consistency, it also exposes a certain evenness. His photographs are precise, measured, and humane, but rarely startling. The work rewards slow attention rather than instant impact – fitting, perhaps, for a career built on proximity itself.

At a time when spectacle dominates photography, McCoy's modest, long-form vision is refreshing and challenging. Proximity suggests that significance often lies on our doorstep if only we have the patience to look.

Books & exhibitions

The latest and best books and exhibitions

Bakewell Cattle Market 1986

A Day at the Market by John Bentley

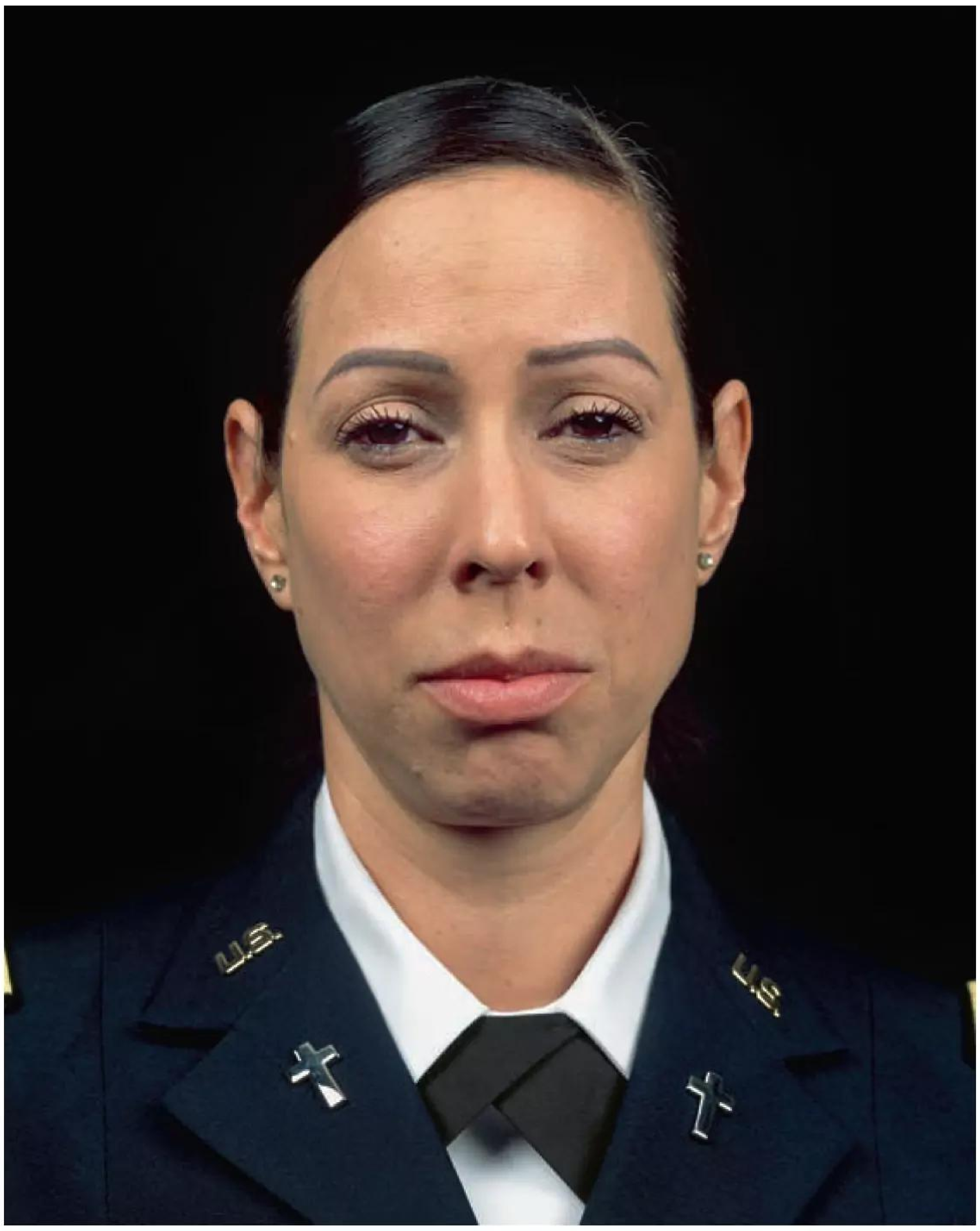
£15, Fistful of Books, Softcover, 88 pages, ISBN: 9781838186005

A DAY AT THE MARKET

Before the out-of-town business parks and supermarket car parks, every market town had its animal mart. They were noisy, earthy places where the rhythms of rural life were played out in public. In *A Day at the Market*, photographer John Bentley captures that world just before it slipped away.

Between 1976 and 1990, Bentley photographed nine livestock markets across Derbyshire and beyond. His black & white images are a record of the architecture and rituals of trade as well as the characters who animated them. We meet farmers in long coats and cloth caps, buying agents in trilbies, auctioneers mid-gesture. As Paul Hill MBE, FRPS writes in his foreword, Bentley's pictures 'say something about the rural economy then and the people who drove it for centuries'. Today, fewer than 100 livestock markets remain in England and Wales. Bentley's pictures are affectionate but unsentimental, grounded in observation rather than nostalgia. The images are built around community, a shared understanding of work, weather and worth. This book tands as record and elegy: a quiet, humane chronicle of a way of life that has all but vanished.

Driffield livestock market 1980



Chaplain Martinez Perez

Sgt. Donna R. Johnson, Killed in action October 1, 2012

Captain Jesse Melton III, U.S. Marine Corps, Killed in action, 2008

The Presence of Absence

by Inbal Abergil

€48 / $56, Kehrer Verlag, Hardcover, 192 Pages, ISBN: 9783969001967

Inbal Abergil's *The Presence of Absence* is a deeply affecting meditation on grief, remembrance and resilience in the aftermath of war. A decade in the making, the project turns its lens on America's Gold Star Families, those who have lost loved ones in military service and the often unseen network of people who bear the weight of that loss.

The portraits are poignant. The still lifes reveal the quiet power of the objects left behind: a bag of hair, a wedding ring, a doorbell. These relics, lovingly preserved, become vessels of memory, fragile yet indelible connections to lives abruptly and often brutally ended.

Alongside these still lifes, the photographer introduces the sombre figures of the Casualty Notification Officers, the men and women tasked with delivering the news that no family ever wants to hear. Their words, captured in accompanying texts, expose a shared vulnerability between messenger and recipient, each permanently altered by the encounter.

Abergil's approach allows the subjects' voices to resonate with clarity and compassion. The effect is tender and restrained.

The book is elegantly designed and richly illustrated. *The Presence of Absence* serves as a document of loss and a testament to endurance. It compels the viewer to look, listen and to consider the human cost of conflict, not in statistics or strategy, but in the undeniable presence of those who have passed. Abergil's work reminds us that death does not end a relationship, merely transforms it.

Chaplain Smith

Girls' Night

by Eimear Lynch (2nd Edition)

£35, IDEA, Hardcover, 128 pages

The girls are back in the second edition of Irish photographer Eimear Lynch's debut photobook *Girls' Night,* a raw, affectionate portrait of teenage girlhood. There's glitter, nerves and the giddy transformation that happens before a night out under the glitterball. Lynch travelled around Ireland, twirling her camera towards the ritual of getting ready. The photographs show hours spent tanning, teasing hair, swapping dresses and secrets in bedrooms strewn with makeup wipes to a soundtrack of pop music.

The resulting images could have been voyeuristic. Instead they're intimate, infused with empathy and nostalgia. Lynch revisits her own adolescence, but the gaze is neither sentimental nor ironic. Her lens captures that fleeting sweet spot, where the excitement of becoming a woman hasn't yet been numbed by adult expectation. Her teenage subjects radiate confidence, self-consciousness and camaraderie in equal measure. Their performances of glamour are tender and triumphant.

Fashion designer Simone Rocha, who contributes a foreword, recognises the world Lynch evokes: ironing hair on an ironing board, MTV blaring in the background, waiting for a ride behind petrol stations. Her words echo the collective memory of Irish girlhood which helps to ground Lynch's portraits in a specific time and place while keeping them universally relatable.

Beautifully produced by IDEA in a clothbound edition of just 500 copies, *Girls' Night* sits comfortably alongside classics like Tom Wood's 1989, *Looking for Love*, and Adrienne Salinger's *In My Room* (1995). Yet it feels utterly contemporary.

A celebration of friendship, identity and the messy, magical business of growing up.

Blurred visions

Photographer Seamus Murphy spent 14 years criss-crossing two rival superpowers. The result, *Strange Love*, blurs borders and expectations to reveal the shared humanity of those caught between them, finds **Peter Dench**

When Seamus Murphy began photographing America in 2005, he wasn't thinking about Russia. He was chasing a long-held idea: a book on post-industrial America to coincide with the 50th anniversary of Jack Kerouac's 1957 book, *On the Road*. 'I sort of missed that by a few years,' he grins.

Murphy was born in the UK (1959) and grew up in Ireland. Some of his earliest memories are political. In Dublin in 1963, he watched President John F Kennedy pass by from his father's shoulders; months later, he remembers his mother weeping at the news of the assassination. At school in 1970, a teacher read aloud from a paperback about Communist Russia and the persecution of religion throughout the Soviet Union.

From childhood, Murphy absorbed two contrasting myths: America, a beacon of freedom that welcomed the Irish, and Russia, a dark power intent on taking over the world. 'America was a dream we had through TV, films and music.'

In 1983 he went to live in the USA for some time, a period in which he taught himself photography. What followed was a career in photojournalism that took him to Afghanistan, Gaza and Iraq. Eventually, he turned his lens back toward America, determined to see how its ideals held up at home, an impulse that became the genesis of *Strange Love*.

It's a crisp early autumn morning on Tradescant Road in Vauxhall, named after the 17th-century gardener John Tradescant the Elder, who helped seed the nation's love of exotic plants. The leaves are starting to brown; the smell of spices tangles with the British fry-up. Terraced housing squats beneath newly built rotundas, barber and beauty shops promise a hair wax and beard trim. The biggest Rottweiler I've ever seen lumbers past, towing a hooded man on a scooter.

From the street, I peer through a window. The silhouette of photographer Seamus Murphy waves back. Inside, Murphy settles into an armchair surrounded by towering shelves of books that tilt and lean like well-thumbed companions. He's dressed in a dark shirt and jeans, the morning light tracing his wiry silver hair. A copy of *Strange Love* rests open on his knee as he talks – measured, reflective, occasionally punctuated by a sharp laugh.

The room, like his pictures, feels lived-in and layered: thoughtful clutter, quiet intensity. There's the sense that every object has a story.

As Murphy's American project drifted and other assignments took over, Russia crept into view. 'I went to Russia a few times and the idea hit me that there was something there too,' he recalls. 'Then Trump started

Above and right: Blagoveshchensk. Amur Oblast. Russia

ALL PICTURES © SEAMUS MURPHY

coming up in 2016 – this is exactly what I was thinking a few years back, the relationship between America and Russia, that strange flirtation. I decided to go back to Russia in a very dedicated way.'

He based himself in the Urals, in the industrial city of Perm. 'It felt like Pittsburgh. Industrial, tough, a big veteran population, immigrants, loyal people. The kind of hinterland both Putin and Trump could work on.' There, while the world obsessed over geopolitics, he set about finding lives that mirrored each other on either side of a divide.

Two worlds, one rhythm

Strange Love, published by Setanta Books, brings together Murphy's photographs from the United States and Russia between 2005 and 2019. The sequencing is simple but unsettling: U.S., Russia, U.S., Russia. No captions, no dates, no clues. Only the viewer's own assumptions to trip them up.

'When you look through the book, you can wonder, which country is this?' he says. Murphy himself often struggles. 'Even now, when I pull out six prints, I sometimes have to remind myself which are which.' The effect is deliberate. 'It's about humanism. Who creates these enemies? Who says we have to kill these people because they're so different? Look through the book and see how many times you get lost between them.'

Murphy's Russia is not the enemy and his America is not

the hero. Through his lens, both become places of ordinary life, of labour, longing and survival. 'It's about how similar we are. How working people live, love and get by under these huge systems of power. The geopolitics are big, but the lives are small and familiar.'

A question of colour

When he first began the American work, Murphy had been a black & white photographer. 'I'd been shooting black & white for years. I wouldn't even think about it. But America already looks like nostalgia. Everything there looks like a 1950s version of the modern world.' So he switched to colour. 'I wanted colour that felt like Eggleston or Hopper, that grainy, cinematic quality. Not too clean. Not too clever. Just something that looked like how it feels to be there.'

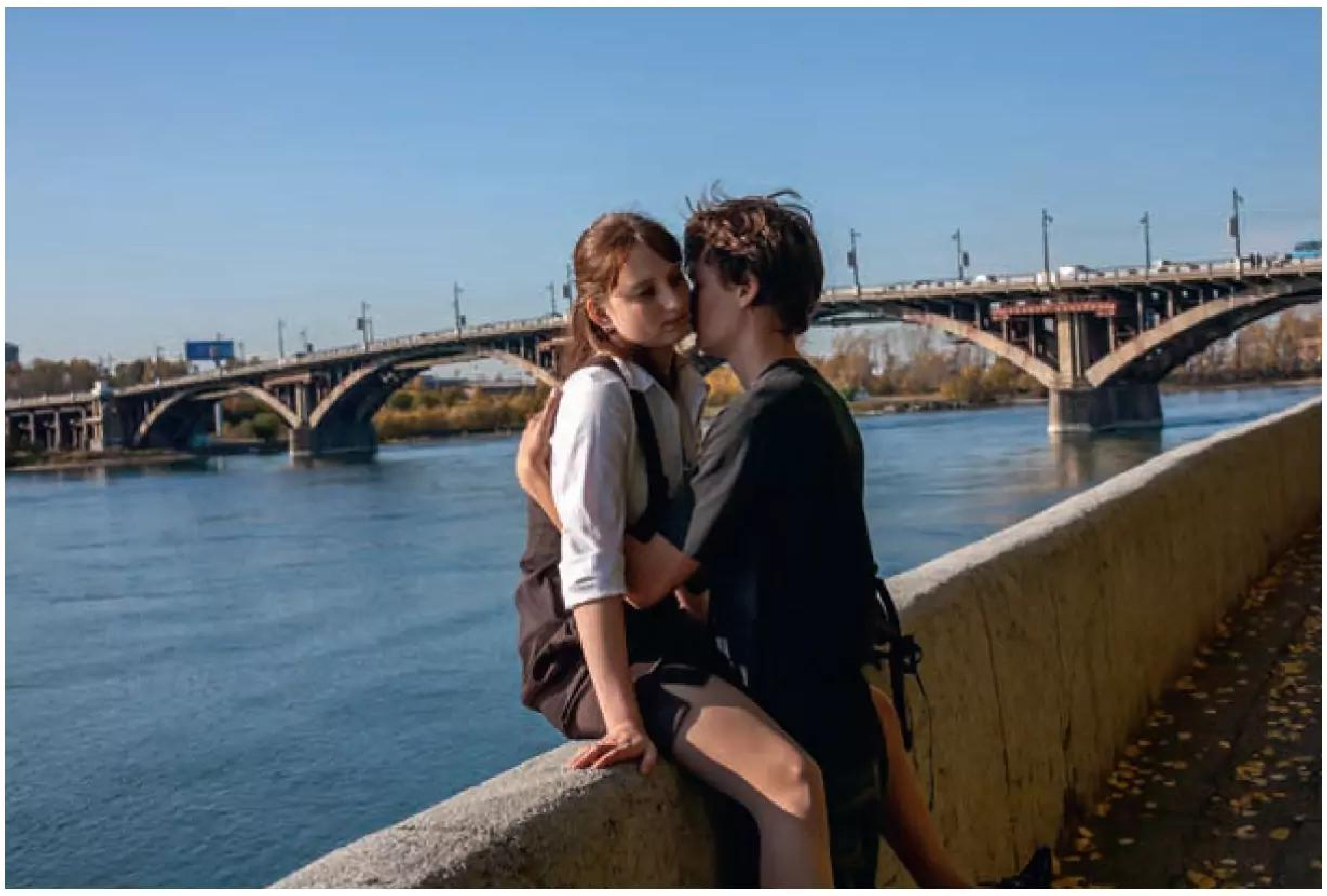
In Russia, he found himself shooting the same way. 'It wasn't about the gloom or the grey. It was about the people. How they behave, how they relate to their surroundings. A good picture is a good picture. You see it in front of you and react.'

The choice of colour and consistency of tone make the disorientation even greater. What looks like an American diner turns out to be a café in Perm; a gas station in Russia resembles something from California's Googie age.

The art of getting lost

Murphy resisted the temptation to pair pictures literally. 'So I made it all one image over a two-page spread.' he says. 'I wanted the confusion to build slowly. Maybe three pages later, you start thinking, "wait, where are we now?" That's the whole point of *Strange Love*.'

He sees the book not as a travelogue or polemic but as an experiment in empathy through misdirection. 'The sequencing was deliberate but not obvious. I wanted you to get lost, to feel that visual unease. The lives mirror each other so closely that it's easy to lose your bearings.' If you do get lost, you can get back on track by checking the image and locations in the index at



Clockwise from left:

Khabarovsk. Khabarovsk Krai. Russia

Oil City. Pennsylvania. USA

Detroit. Michigan. USA

Irkutsk. Irkutsk Oblast. Russia

Yazva. Perm Krai. Russia

the back of the book.

That visual confusion mirrors the political one. The blurred lines between patriotism and propaganda, pride and insecurity. In Murphy's world, flags, factories and dance halls echo each other across continents.

Making the book

The project took years to reach print, surviving false starts. Of his editing process he says, 'I scatter small prints across the carpet and move them around. Meaning changes when you see prints, things you thought would be in the book just don't work. And when you take them out, the sequence gets stronger.'

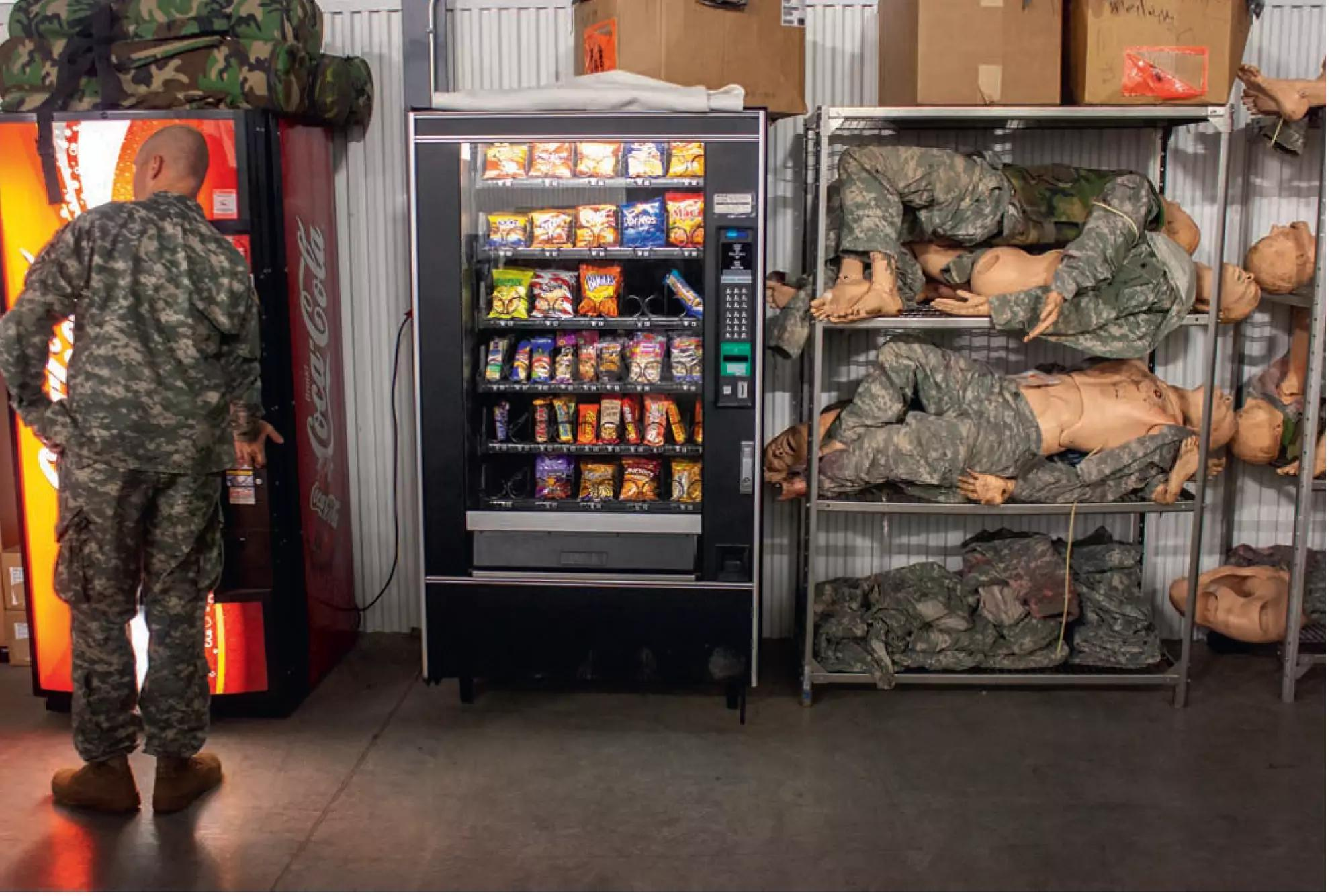
He eventually whittled thousands of frames down to around 130 images. 'I sent a PDF to publisher Twin Palms, and that night they emailed: We're going to publish this. Then the pandemic hit and everything collapsed. Years later, I met Keith Cullen from Setanta books at Photo London, that's how the book finally happened.'

Murphy is quick to credit his designer, Lizzie Ballantyne, who also worked on *The Republic*, a book that captures the spirit of Irish life in the centenary of Easter 1916, and *The Hollow of the Hand*, a collaboration with PJ Harvey's powerful poetry. 'You come with ideas and the designer says, "That's not going to work," and they show you. It's a conversation.' He also acknowledges friend and film director Nicholas Barker, who helped with the sequencing over many years and changes. Most helpful of all in the early America days was photographer Jocelyn Bain Hogg. 'He has such a great grasp of what photography, and photography books are all about, and what they can be.'

As for the layout, there was debate. 'The temptation was to play the pictures directly against each other, but I just thought it was too neat,' Murphy tels me. 'It works better when the echo sneaks up on you.'

A European in America

Murphy is aware that photographing America as a



Left: Fort Riley. Kansas. USA

Below: Yuzhno Sakhalinsk. Sakhalin Island. Russia

European comes with baggage. 'Every photographer wants to cover America, but we're up against so much history and the weight of everyone who's already done it. And as a European, you're always the outsider.'

He laughs at the thought of pitching it to American publishers. 'People told me, don't bother. They're not going to get it. There's this thing about a European coming in and telling them what's what, you'll be up against that. And yes, bringing Russia into it definitely made it more interesting. It stopped being just another European looking at America.'

Tools and temperament

For the technically minded, Murphy's rule is simple: 'The film is all America; Russia was digital,' he explains. 'But I don't think that matters. Sometimes you can tell which is which, sometimes you can't. And that suits the book's idea perfectly.'

He used Canon digital bodies for Russia, EOS 5Ds and 5D Mark IIs, after years of film Leicas and Canons. 'It was never about film versus digital. It's about what the picture feels like. If the feeling's right, the medium doesn't matter.'

Human, not political

Though *Strange Love* inevitably brushes against politics, Murphy insists: 'It's a humanist project. It's about ordinary people caught between two systems of power, the ones who always pay the price.'

He's not interested in proving a thesis so much as prompting a question: can we even tell the difference any more? The answer, looking through *Strange Love*, is often no. The same cars rust in the same light; the same faces glance up from factory gates and half-lit bars.

When asked what the book means to him, he pauses. 'The book is done. It's on the shelf. It's got its ISBN, that little mark in the world,' he reflects. 'Until you make the book, it's unresolved. When it's done, you can finally let go.'

Strange Love is a farewell of sorts – to the long haul of fieldwork, to an old way of seeing the world divided neatly into East and West, to the assumption that human stories must belong to one flag or another. Murphy's pictures make the case, quietly, beautifully, that they never did. **AP**

STRANGE LOVE
SEAMUS MURPHY

Strange Love by Seamus Murphy is published by Setanta Books, hardback, £60, 88 images, 192 pages. ISBN: 9781915652218

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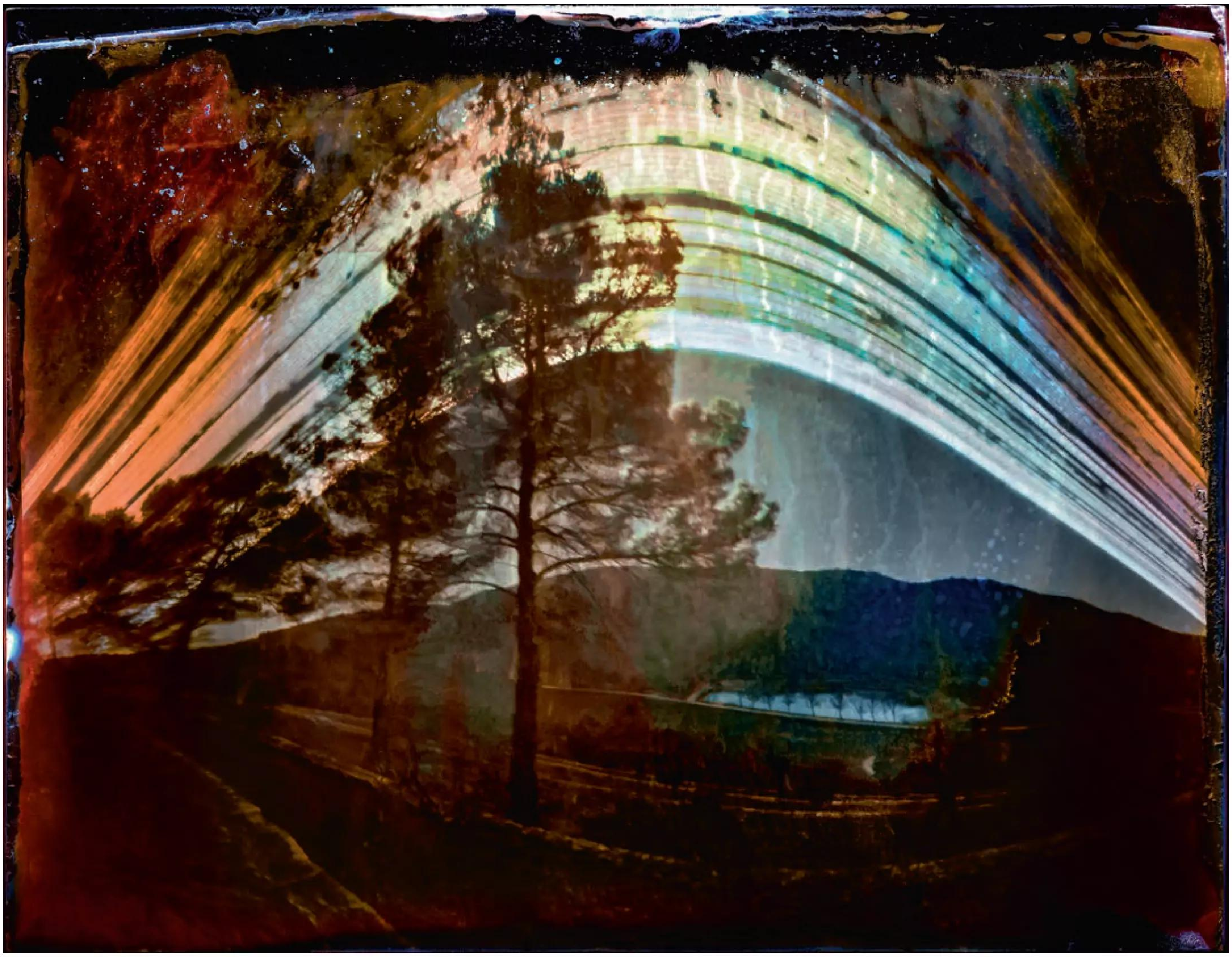


ALL PICTURES © ROBERT CHARLES MANN

It's about time

Photo artist Robert Charles Mann captures the sun's passage across the sky as artist-in-residence at the Château Miraval. **Graeme Greene** finds out more

Above: Solargraph, Chateau-Miraval

Every six months, on the summer or winter solstice, Robert Charles Mann makes the 500-mile journey from his home in France's Loire Valley to Château Miraval, Brad Pitt's wine estate in the south of the country. 'It's a magnificent place,' says Mann. 'I've known Brad for some time. It's always a real pleasure to be there.'

Mann isn't there simply to guzzle rosé with his friend, but to check in on the pinhole cameras that he set up six months prior, removing the negatives and mounting new cameras. 'I never know what's coming,' he tells me, describing the anticipation of seeing what the cameras have produced each time. 'The waiting, the appreciation, the anxiousness of seeing the images, and whether I've failed or not, it's a big part of my life.'

Fifty of Mann's mysterious, dreamlike works from Château Miraval are collected together in his new book *Solargraphs*. A solargraph is a photographic image created with pinhole cameras using long exposures that capture the sun's movement across the sky for periods of time, in Mann's case six months.

Pinhole cameras are a low-tech idea – anyone could build one.

Mann makes many of his from coffee cans or round whisky bottle containers, though his pinholes (around 0.5mm) are produced using a laser for precise control over the aperture. But the simple camera process is combined with high-end, digital production techniques. 'When I harvest the cameras on the solstice, bring them back to the studio and take the paper out, it goes straight on the scanner,' Mann explains. 'I scan the paper at 400MB – big files – because sometimes I do prints up to 3 metres. It goes into Photoshop and I start working, maybe cropping… There's quite a lot of spotting and retouching to do. Often, there's water damage in the camera, which I leave, but I take out some of the dust or other stuff'.

Multitude of colours

'In Photoshop, I spend a lot of time discovering what's there. The paper I use inside the camera for the negative is silver-coated black and white paper. The colours come from the nature of the silver halide formulas of different brands of paper. That's all in the negative. If you zoom into the paths of the sun, you can see the multitude of colours available, albeit subtle. Silver has a lot of colour in it inherently.'

Mann's been producing solargraphs at Château Miraval for a decade, working with as many as 12 cameras at a time, each mounted at a different location. The images sometimes bring in tree branches, the curves of hills or other landscape features, as well as the all-important sun. 'When I'm mounting the cameras, I have an approximation of where the sun's going to be in the sky, just by using a compass, and where I am in latitude,' Mann adds. 'Sometimes the cans are mounted horizontally, sometimes vertically. They give very different images based on the way the curvature of the can works. The ones that contract towards the edges are vertical, the ones that expand are horizontally mounted.'

Whereas most photography freezes a moment, Manns' solargraphs capture six months of time in a specific place. 'It's about my appreciation of the sun and the cosmos, and a homage to the passing of time. I've studied astronomy and astrophysics most of my life as a closet scientist. Things that are ephemeral – birds flying, people walking past – all that is there somewhere, maybe in one molecule of the silver. Of course, you don't see that. But all those experiences and each day of the sun passing is all in there. The other thing I like is seeing where the sun was on each day. There are 182 passes of the sun in each solargraph. You can also determine if it was a cloudy day, if the lines are broken.

'Sometimes the solargraphs become ink blots. People walk up to these images and don't know I'm the creator. I hear them talking – it provokes a story about a person in their life, or they can see something in there. I love that.'

The old-school cameras and slow, patient process goes against the current trend for high-tech digital cameras and instant gratification. Mann also enjoys the experimentation, an approach he also utilises in making music – he's worked on soundtracks for adverts, TV and film, including some of the music featured in Pitt's film *Ad Astra*. 'It's all to do with "generative music" and "generative photography".

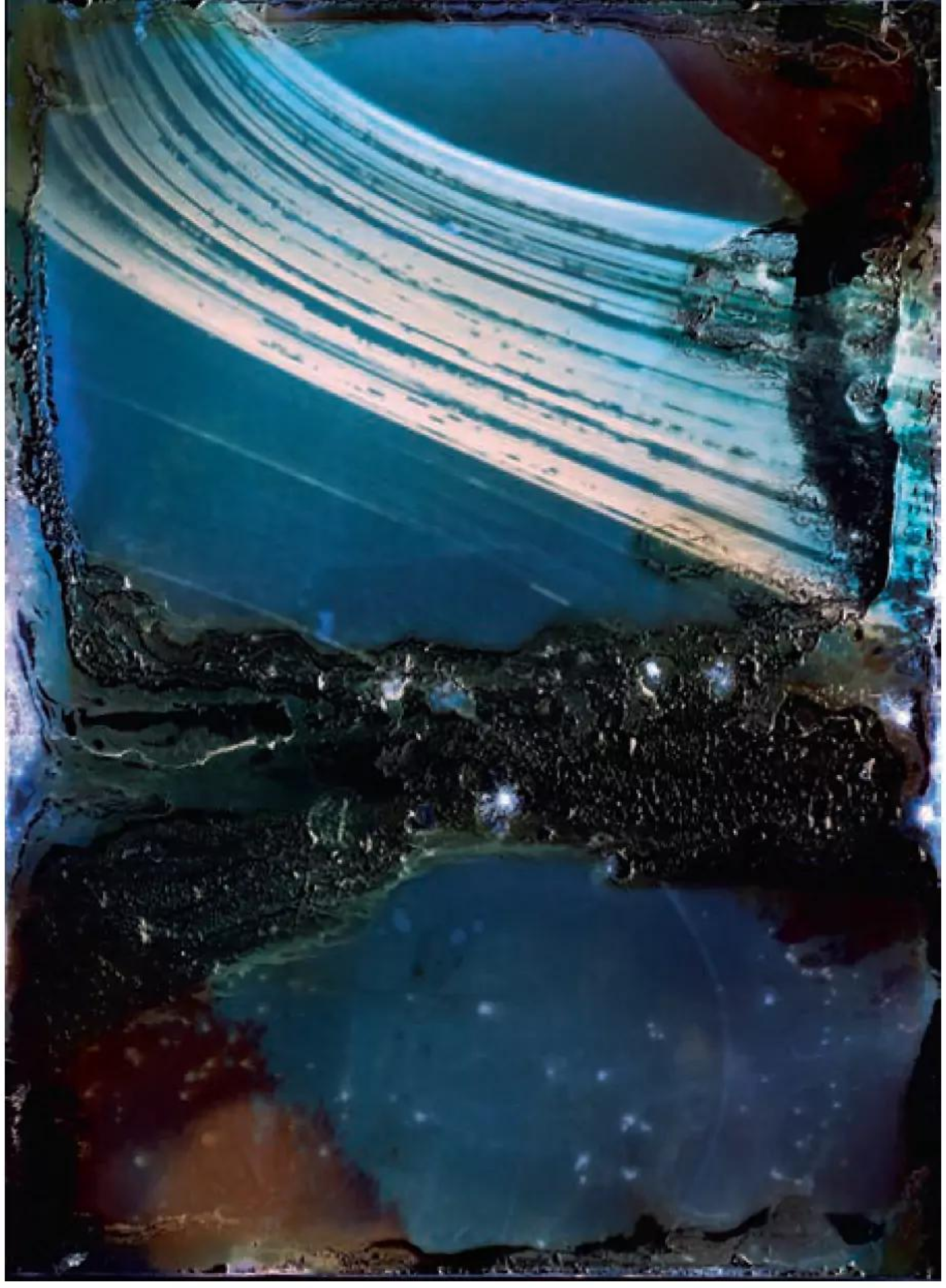
'These cameras live in nature for six months. They get shit on by birds, they get moved, they get rained on and there's water inside. All that is part of their life. With the generative process in music, I'm setting things up on a modular synthesiser and putting things in place that will ultimately change other things down the line – something will happen, despite my own interaction with it. It's the same with solargraphs. I can guide it in a certain way but then it has its own life.'

Journey of discovery

As with any trial and error, it doesn't always work out. 'Earlier on, there was a higher failure rate,' Mann confirms. 'But now I've learnt my lessons. I know how to seal the cans much better, which helps with potential water damage. I've also learnt more about how to place them and fix them to things. I've discovered a lot about different types of glue and wire.'

Born in Wisconsin in 1960, Mann was interested in the sun and photography from an early age. 'As a child, I remember watching the eclipse with my dad and brother,' he tells me. 'We had a big piece of cardboard with a pinhole in it. We hooked it up and looked at all the eclipses on the ground. We also did shoebox cameras at school. My dad had a darkroom in the house – he was a photographer, doing wedding photography and that kind of thing. I started printing his negatives when I was eight. I understood the whole process before I even took a photo. I was under the red and yellow lights with my brother, printing negatives. That's where the fascination became an infatuation. Boy, when I picked up the camera, I was, like, "Oh, this is what's happening!"'

In 1979 Mann moved to Hollywood to study music, composition and performance. He used his darkroom experience and printing knowledge to support himself, making prints for the Photo Impact lab and then freelance in Los Angeles, New York and Paris. Over the next 30 years, he



Top: Solargraph, Chateau-Miraval

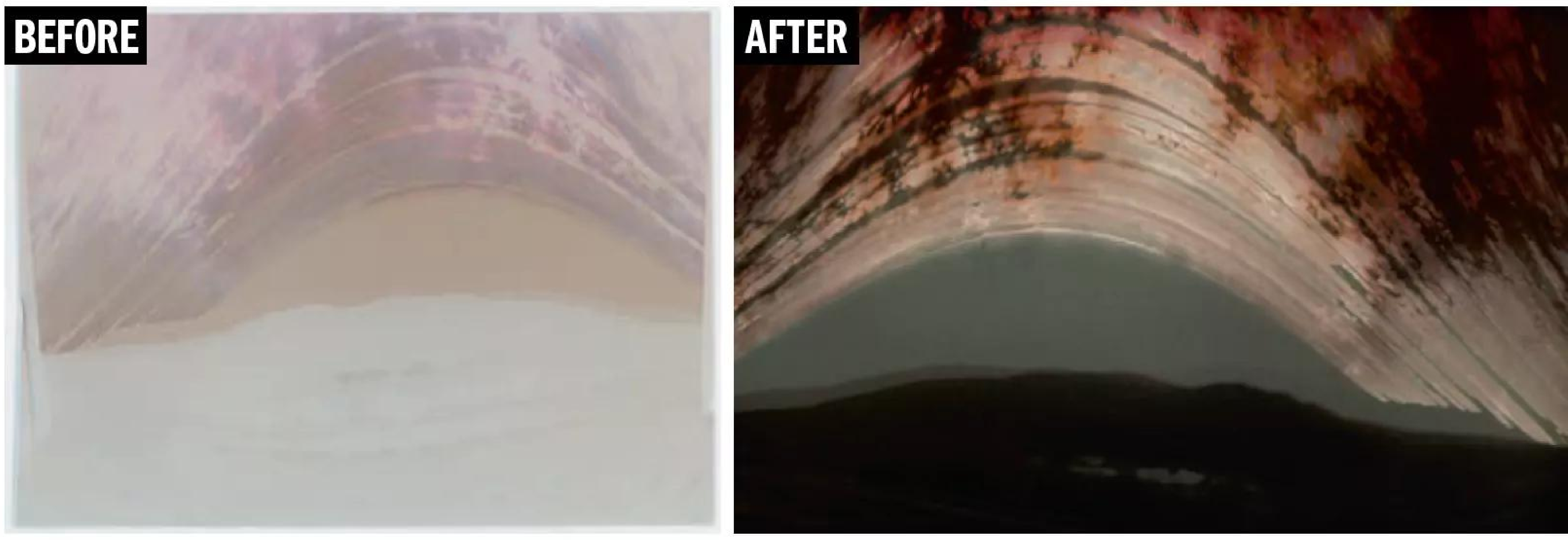
Above: Pioneering photographer Robert Charles Mann with his book of Solargraphs

became the go-to expert for acclaimed photographers, including Helmut Newton, Mary Ellen Mark, Dennis Hopper, Peter Lindbergh and Herb Ritts, among many others.

It was his reputation as a master printer that connected him with Pitt, who wrote the foreword for *Solargraphs*. 'Brad's an autodidact polymath,' says Mann. 'He's an architect, he builds furniture, all kinds of things, and photography is one of the things in his palette as a creator, black & white specifically. He was accumulating a lot of negs – mainly photos of family. Around 2005, he started looking for a printer, not just a master printer but someone he could trust, so he contacted the Herb Ritts Foundation, and I used to work with them. He spoke to the CEO Mark McKenna and said "I'm looking for someone to take on this project", and Mark suggested me. Brad called, and after that we got on like a house on fire.

'We've spent a lot of time in the darkroom together – weeks and months sometimes. We did several different projects together. The first was for *W* magazine, when he was still with Angie. It was a beautiful story: Angie and photos of the children. It was a different time, of course. And we went from there. He wanted to keep printing. We'd print in LA or in Paris.'

Mann went on to introduce Pitt to his solargraphy. 'I first set up cameras at Brad's place in LA, around 2013 or 2014. He has a little place up the coast in California where I did some solargraphs. He got really into the idea of having a recording of the sun going over his properties from different points of the planet. I suggested, Hey, let's do Château Miraval, with no idea that it would blossom into a book ten years later. I just wanted to do a few and see how it goes.'



Above: Solargraph, Chateau-Miraval. The RAW negative (left) and the final image

Below right: One of Mann's pinhole cameras fixed in position

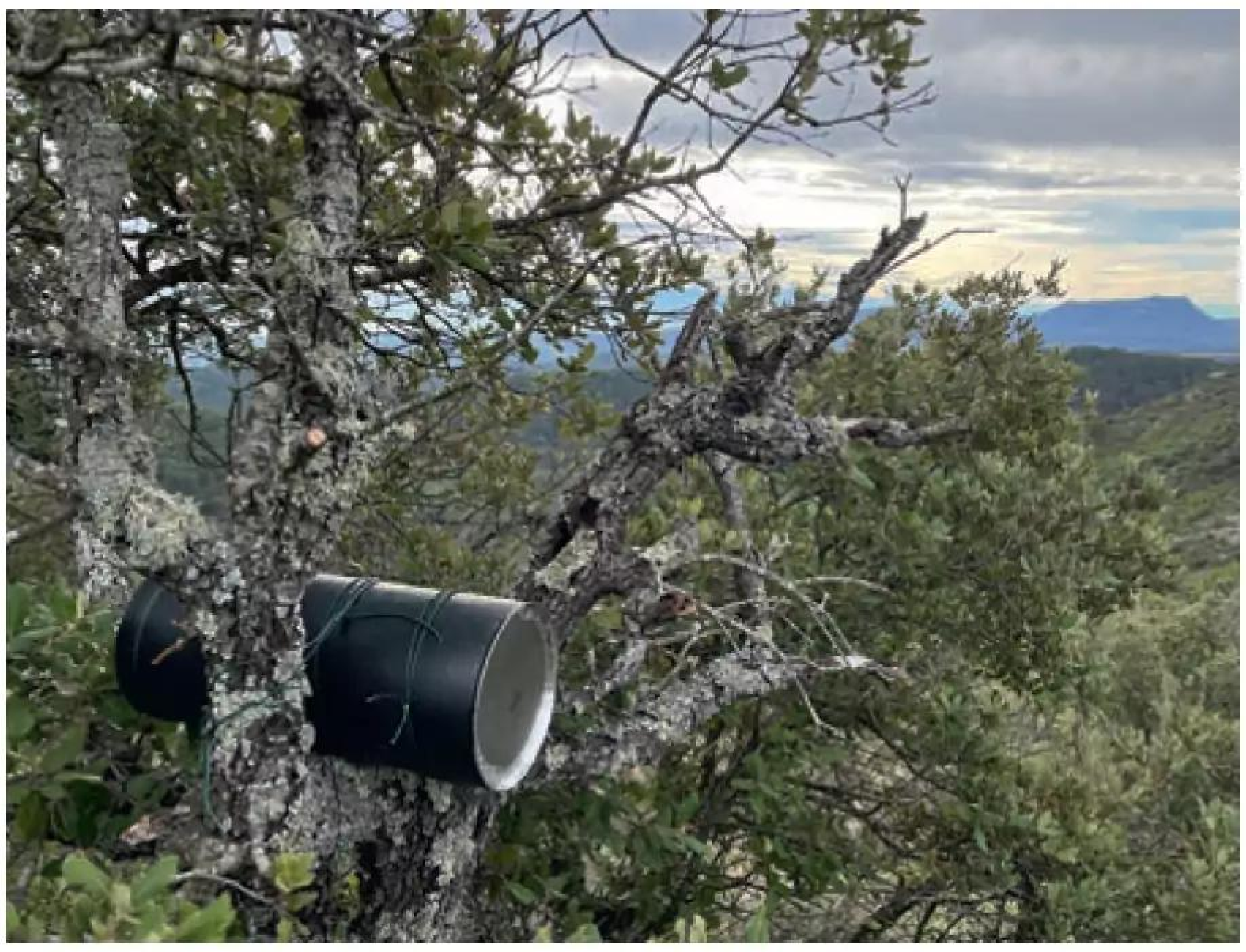
Below left: Mann positioning a pinhole camera

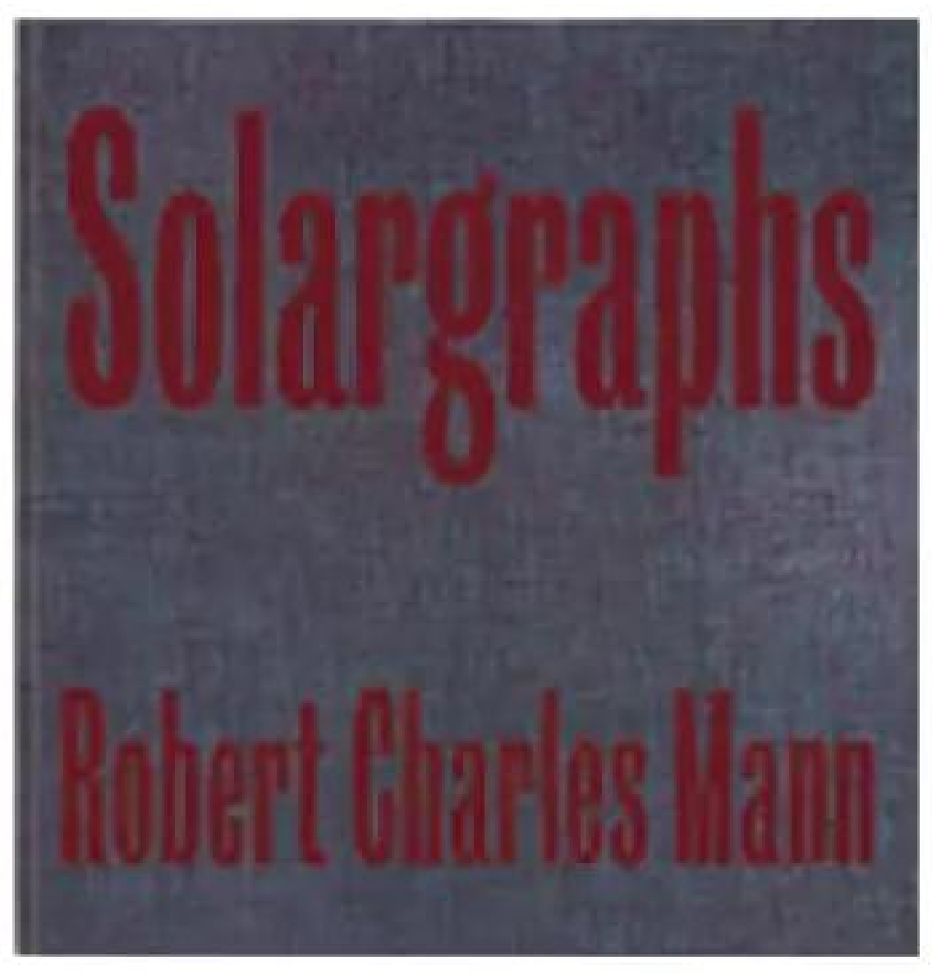
The two men share an interest in time and metaphysics. 'Brad's totally fascinated with it. He enjoys supporting artists he knows and artists he appreciates. We also speak about the more difficult metaphysical question of what these images really are. He loves the idea that all these events on photographic paper, made in handmade pinhole cameras, are all from his "spots" on the Earth.'

On Mann's website, there are many other kinds of images, from portraits to landscapes, created using pinhole cameras. He's also been working as artist-in-residence at Château de Chambord, the largest château in the Loire Valley, producing solargraphs with 45 pinhole cameras, the results of which will run as an exhibition there from March 2026. 'I'm really excited,' he says. 'It's the first time I've really incorporated architecture, so there's a lot of strange morphing of the towers. I was up at the top of the towers, mounting cameras on the highest places on Chambord. I was enjoying the hell out of it.'

He's not finished with pinhole cameras yet. 'I've got some ideas for different shapes of cans and boxes and objects, and doing multiple holes in the cans,' he tells me. 'I'm going to try the cameras with a double pinhole – the pinhole will be as close as possible, without breaking the actual substrate, which is a very thin piece of stainless steel, in order to get the interference patterns. I'll work on double pinhole experiments and perhaps pinholes from opposite sides of the camera.'

With each new approach, does he have a sense of what the results will look like? 'No,' he says with a smile. 'But it'll be very strange.'





Solargraphs

Robert Charles Mann

Solargraphs by Robert Charles Mann, with a foreword by Brad Pitt, is published (£50) by Hemeria: **hemeria.com/en-gb/products/solargraphs-robert-charles-mann**

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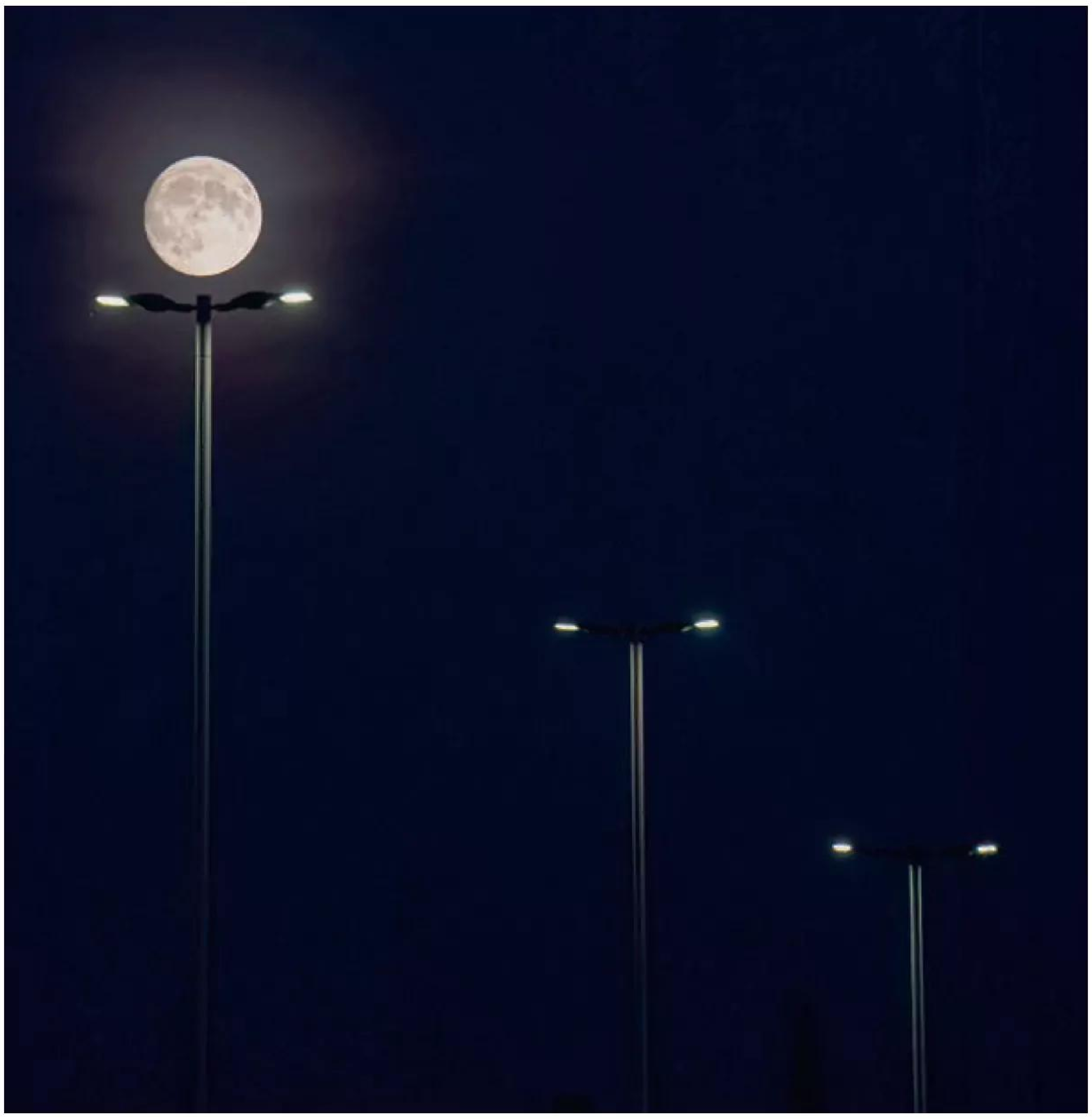
Round Six: The Best of the Rest

The APOY judges choose their favourite images that didn't make the top ten of our Night and Low Light category

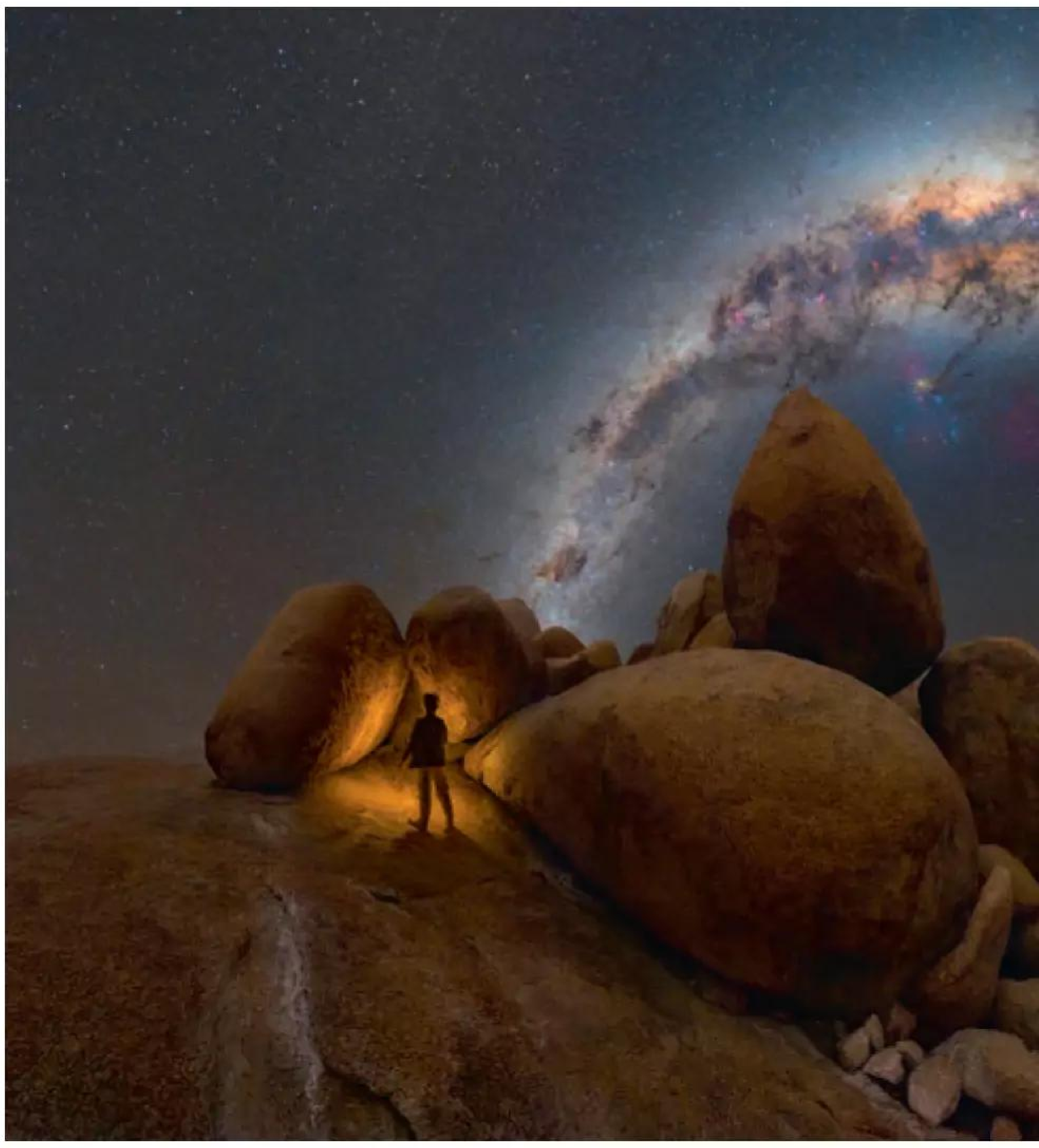


Jessica Miller, deputy online editor, chooses **Moon-lights by Rob Reynolds, Plymouth**

Sony A7 Mark III, 28-200mm at 200mm, 1/125sec at f/8, ISO 2000

Jessica says: 'Regular night photographer Rob has captured the perfect moment the moon has risen over a streetlight, transforming a familiar urban fixture into something more unusual.

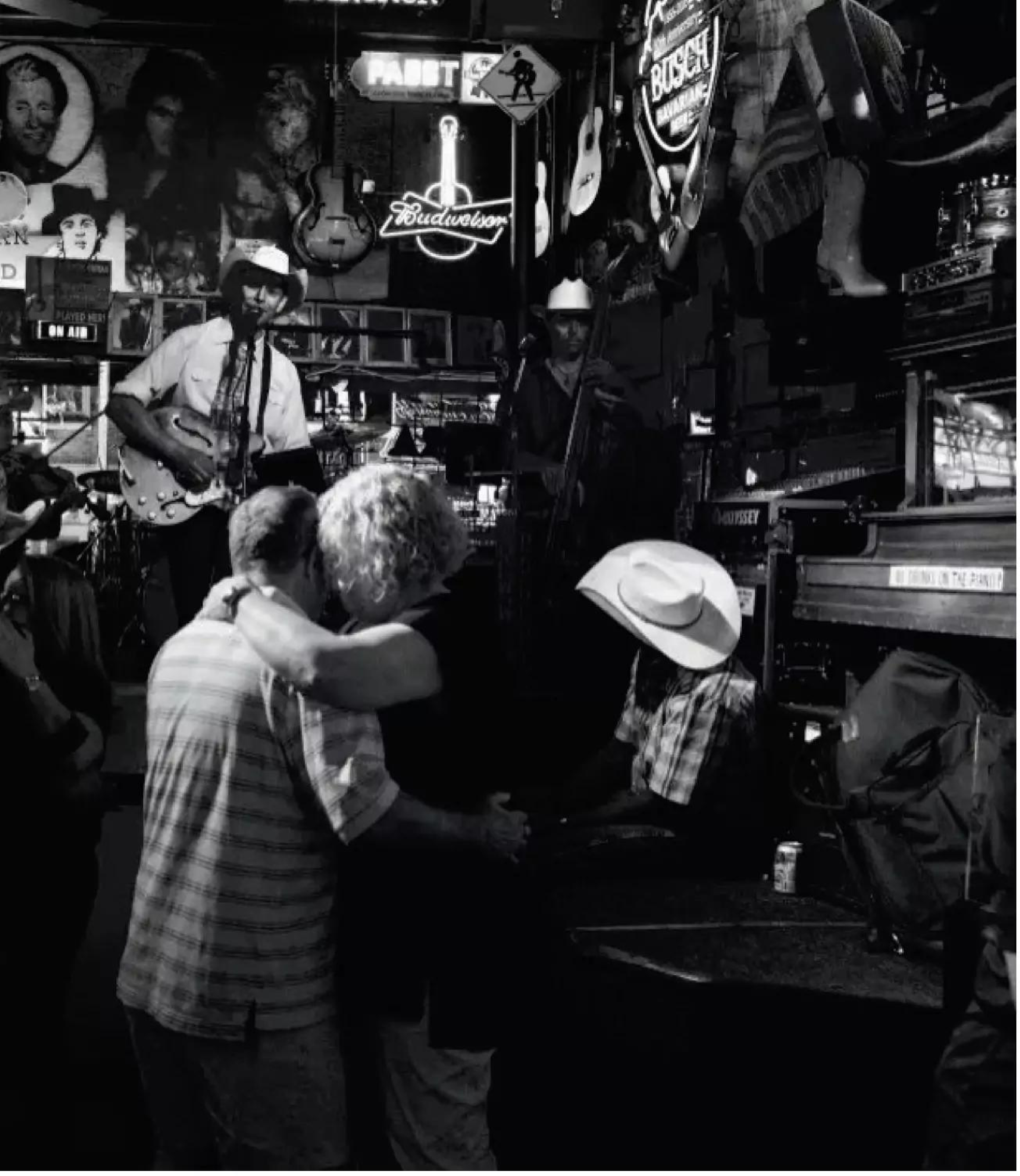
'I was drawn to the minimalist but playful composition of this shot – it's a compelling example of creativity, timing and perspective. Thanks to the positioning and angle of the photographer, at first glance the moon looks like a glowing bulb perched at the top of the light, or a golf ball on a tee. The crop to square draws our attention to the story in the frame, while the evenly spaced streetlights and the centrally placed moon on the tallest light on the left, naturally encourages the viewer's eye to read the image from left to right.'



Geoff Harris, deputy editor, chooses **Stone Guardians of the Night by Matteo Strassera, Rome, Italy**

Canon EOS R5, 14mm, 120sec at f/3.5, ISO 4000

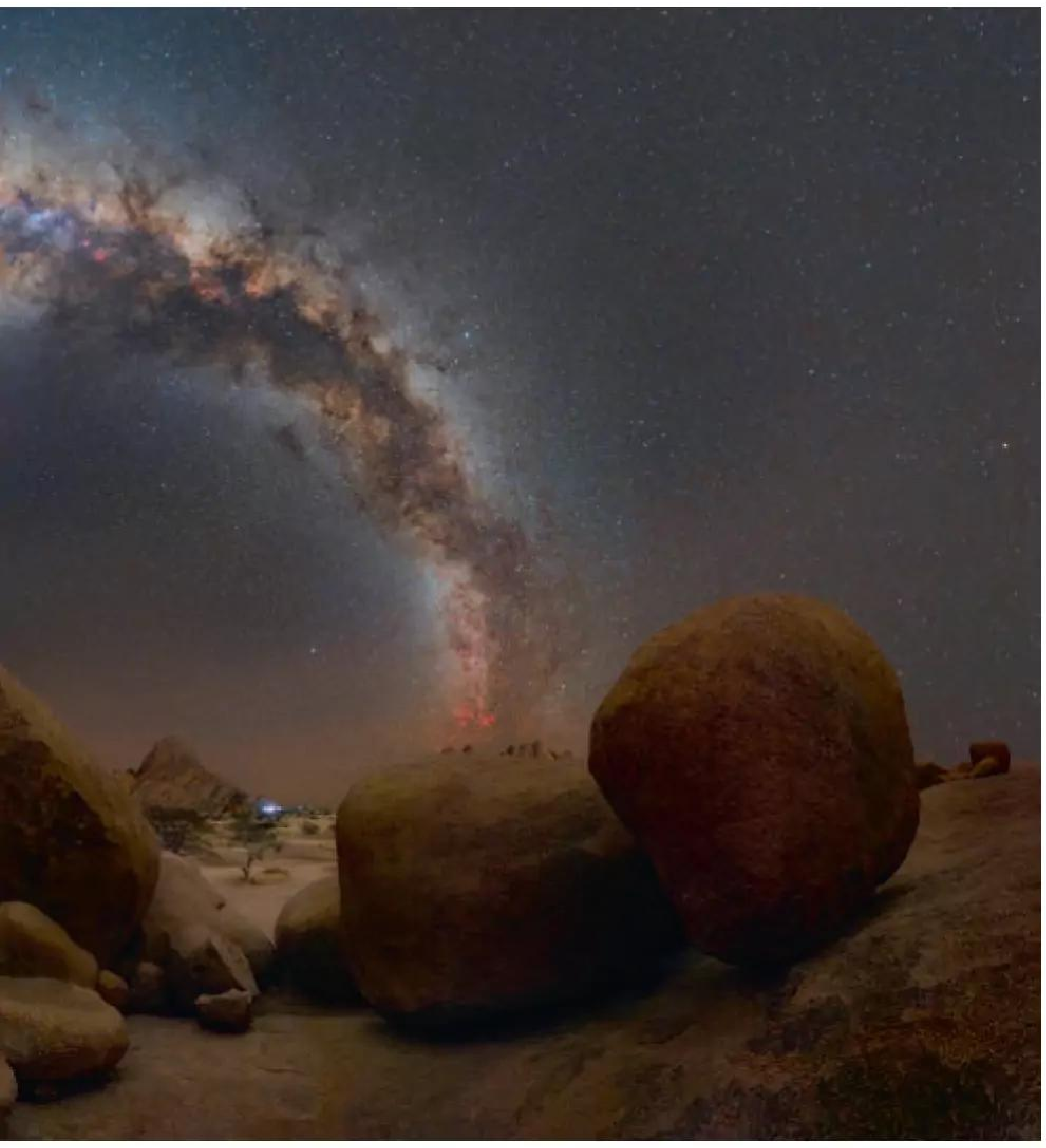
Geoff says: 'I was struck by this image, which uses long exposure and light painting to capture ancient boulders under the vast Namibian heavens, with the Milky Way blazing overhead. Some light painting and astro-



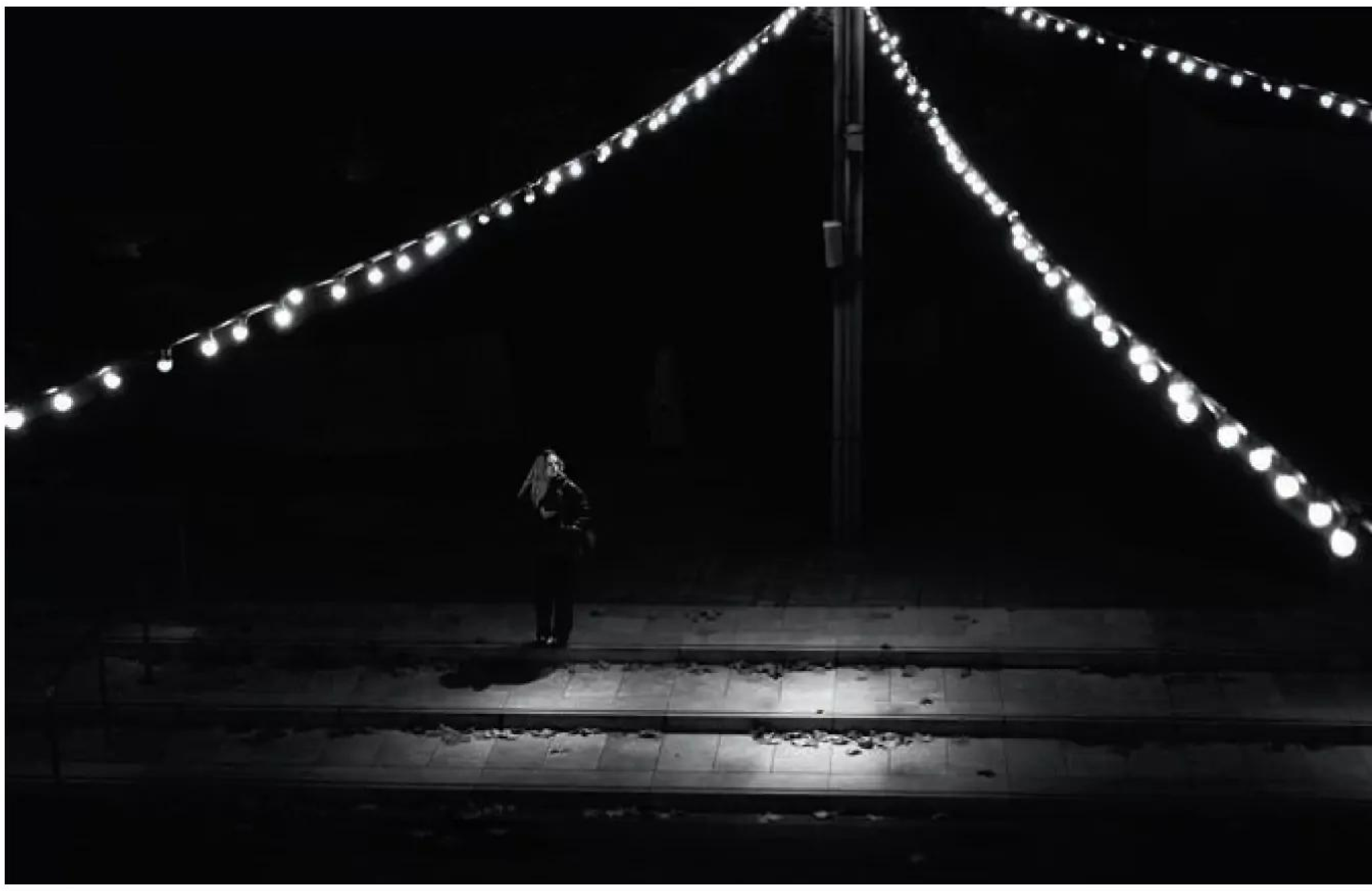
Ailsa McWhinnie, APOY project manager, chooses **Robert's Bar, Nashville, USA by Patrick Reilly, County Louth, Ireland**

Camera details unknown

Ailsa says: 'This image could only have been taken somewhere like Nashville – and it also could have been taken yesterday or 50 years ago, such is the scene's timelessness. It's not only the black & white conversion that gives Patrick's shot its captivating atmosphere – although that certainly helps – it's also the dancing couples, lost in the moment, who we see moving through the light and shade of the bar. It's as if they're being given the opportunity to forget about whatever their concerns may be and simply feel the music – which, as viewers, we can almost hear. The contrast has been well managed, and Patrick has brought out just enough detail in the couples who are in the shadows. And although it might seem like a straightforward enough capture, his split-second timing has caught the man about to step through the door on the left, coming into the bar to enjoy his evening of escapism.'



photography can feel a bit like it's showing off technique for the sake of it, but this image is full of mystery, asks questions, and is beautifully composed. The Milky Way looks like a cosmic rainbow over the mysterious boulders, and the person is perfectly placed, giving the right sense of scale. The exposure is spot on too, with plenty of shadow detail. I am not sure what the other light is in the distance, but it adds to the mystery of the image, rather than being a distraction. A "stone" cold winner, in my book!'



Peter Dench, acting features editor, chooses **Woman on the South Bank by Graeme Youngson, Aberdeen**

Fujifilm X-T5, 33mm, 1/250sec at f/1.4, ISO 1250

Peter says: 'A young woman alone in a weak pool of light, toes turned in, stands on the South Bank. It's a moment of pause along a usually busy part of London. The photographer's timing is just right. We assume there'll be someone passing by at any given moment. I've a daughter of a similar looking age. It's a scene I've played in my head many times. That anxious interval between a good night out and a safe journey home. The absence of colour escalates the tension. The choice, or necessity of a shallow depth of field on the Fujifilm X-T5, isolates the figure, the leaves give texture, a few shapes lurk in the gloom. The string of bulbs add perspective. To me it's unsettling and there's nothing wrong with a photograph that evokes that.'

Now is the time to save on some superb Honor phones

Save big on Honor's best phones for photography, video and more

With Black Friday almost here, don't miss these great discounts on Honor's highly capable phones for stills and video

This issue goes on sale a few days before Black Friday officially starts on 28 November, but leading smartphone maker Honor has already announced some great discounts on its powerful smartphones for photography. The main Honor store for the UK is at honor.com.

Honor Magic 7 Pro

This flagship phone is an excellent choice for photography, featuring a 50MP main camera with f/1.4-f/2.0 self-adjusting aperture and optical image stabilisation (OIS), along with a 50MP, f/2 ultra-wide camera and a 50MP f/2 front or 'selfie' camera.

But the real star of the show here is the far-reaching telephoto camera, based around a 200MP 1/1.4in telephoto sensor. You also get a fast aperture of f/2.6, OIS, 3x optical zoom and 100x digital zoom, so it is fantastic for capturing distant detail. With the innovative AI SuperZoom feature, which is activated when you go past 30x zoom, far-away subjects come a lot closer. Distance really is no object.

The Honor Magic 7 Pro is also a great choice for portrait photographers. In addition to AI editing tools for improving clarity and bokeh in your people shots, you get access to the Harcourt portrait modes, named after the famous Parisian studio. These include atmospheric black & white effects, while Classic and Vibrant also add a touch of Parisian style to your portraits.

If you like to shoot action – for example, sports or just fast-moving kids or pets – the Honor Magic 7 Pro can also capture 10 frames per second with the HD Super Burst Mode feature. An AI-powered auto capture feature also selects the best image for you from a series of shots. The phone is a video star too, able to record footage in 4K up to 60p. Last but not least, the Honor Magic 7 Pro is a great phone to take on winter breaks. You get AI translation across 13 languages, and the 5270mAh battery is long lasting. With IP69-certification, you can even take the Magic 7 Pro into very hot and steamy showers! It's got a built-in subwoofer for enjoying music and movies on the move, too.

Black Friday discounts

- Available for just £799.99 (27% off), via the Honor Amazon Store until 7 December (grey/black models).
- You can also save on selected contract tariffs with EE, 02 and Three. See the Honor store or networks for more details.

Honor 400 Pro

This mid-range phone is unbeatable value for photographers and videographers, offering a powerful triple-camera setup and a genuinely useful toolbox of AI-powered editing features. The Honor 400 Pro's 200MP, f/1.9 main camera is particularly effective, featuring a large 1/1.4in sensor and OIS. This is backed up by a a 50MP telephoto camera with 3x optical zoom (f/2.4), a 12MP, f/2.2 ultra-wide and 50MP front camera. As with the Magic 7 Pro, AI SuperZoom helpfully kicks in after 30x zoom in order to capture distant detail. Another neat AI feature on the 400 Pro is Image to Video, which enables you to create a short five-second video from a still photograph. This cool feature has tons of applications, from animating a shot of your goldfish to adding movement to scanned-in pictures of family members from the past.

Meanwhile, the suite of AI photo-editing tools comes in very handy for removing distractions from your shots, cutting out objects (without any of the faff of Photoshop), expanding images you have cropped too tightly, and so on. These really are a big time saver when it comes to getting your pictures ready to share on social media. Video can also be captured at 4K and 60fps. When you look at the Black Friday discount below, you really are getting a lot of smartphone for your money.

Black Friday discounts

- The Honor 400 Pro will be available for £499.99 (28% off) via the Honor Amazon Store until 7 December.

Honor Magic V5

Honor's newest foldable phone is also discounted, and again, it offers powerful camera performance with all the convenience and style of a foldable phone. Camera specs include a 50MP main camera based on a 1/1.56in sensor, along with a fast f/1.6 aperture and OIS; a 64MP telephoto camera with f/2.5 aperture, OIS, 3x optical zoom and 100x digital zoom; a 50MP, f/2 ultra-wide camera with OIS and a 20MP, f/2.2 selfie camera. You can also record video at up to 4K 60p. AI SuperZoom and the Harcourt Portrait modes are available too, and a lot more besides.

Black Friday discounts

- The Honor Magic V5 is available for just £1,399.99 (£300 off) on the main Honor store and Honor Amazon store until 7 December.
- You get a free Honor 400 Lite if you buy from O2 until 10 December while Vodafone offers up to £918 savings until 1 December.

Other great Honor phone deals

Further down Honor's range, you can also enjoy great savings on some very capable smartphones for photography and video until December:

- HONOR X5C Plus (128GB), now £79.99 until 7 December.
- HONOR X5C Plus (64GB), now £59.99 until 7 December.
- You can also save on the 400 Lite and Smart with EE, the 400 with Vodafone and the 400 Lite with Three. See their websites.

Cast your vote in the Amateur Photographer Readers' Choice Awards!

The Amateur Photographer Readers' Choice Awards are here! Have you been really impressed by a new camera, lens or accessory in the past 12 months? Or a camera retailer, exhibition, book or photography vlogger? Now's your chance to share your love via this easy online form.

The deadline for voting is 11:59pm GMT on 31st December 2025. The winners of this public vote will be honoured at our glittering awards ceremony in London on Thursday, 26th February 2026.

Have you say on the following AP Readers' Choice Awards:

- Good Service Awards (Your favourite retailer or service provider)
- Camera of the Year
- Lens of the Year
- Accessory of the Year
- Photo Community of the Year
- Content Creator of the Year
- Photography Event/Workshop Provider

Which camera has most impressed you this year? Have you bought and used a new lens, or a game-changing accessory this year, and want to let others know how good it is?

Have you attended a great photography event in 2025? Tell us about it. Which YouTubers and content creators have inspired and entertained you the most? Finally, are you part of a photography community that has helped, encouraged and inspired you? Show your support for them with a vote in our awards.

Simply point your phone's camera at this QR code to vote, or visit: bit.ly/apreaderchoice

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Even with the 2x teleconverter, sharp in-flight shots are possible
OM System OM-1 Mark II, MC-20, 400mm, 1/3200sec at f/5.6, ISO 2500

An all-terrain vehicle?

Andrew Fusek Peters does a deep dive into the new OM System 50-200mm F2.8 IS Pro

I work as a wildlife photographer in the UK, and have for many years now used OM System kit for its light weight and size and the raw files that deliver great colour science. With the OM-1 and OM-1 Mark II cameras, I can now achieve decent dynamic range, and I worry much less about using high ISO, as well-exposed files clean up nicely. But a camera body is only as good as the glass that focuses and captures the world around me.

Back in July, I was given the opportunity to test the OM System 50-200mm F2.8 IS Pro before it came out. What interested me was that potentially, this was three lenses in one. Firstly, the extra reach compared to the previous 40-150mm f/2.8 meant it could be perfect for insect close-ups and insects in flight, while not getting too close to disturb. Secondly, as a full-frame equivalent of a 100-400mm (and up to 800mm with teleconverters), it meant it could also work with birds. And thirdly, with the crazy minimum focus distance (giving 1:1 magnification with the 2x teleconverter), it could add macro abilities to its portfolio.

It's a lot to ask of a lens, but my experience in testing convinced me this was an important addition to my bag. So as soon as it came out, I ordered my copy. What I found alongside all of the above was an incredibly fast-focusing, super-lightweight optic that gave professional results and that now, months later, I am only beginning to scratch the surface of. I have been able to test the lens in a variety of scenarios and

Focus peaking got the eye of the goldfinch pin-sharp
OM System OM-1 Mark II, MC-20, 400mm, 1/200sec at f/6.3, ISO 1600

really put it through its paces, and can safely say it's as sharp and quick to focus and track as some of the best fast white glass on the market.

Weight and handling

The lens feels incredibly light and well-balanced in the hand, and comes out at 1.075kg on its own, or 1.25kg with the hood and tripod adapter. With a shoulder strap, I had no issue carrying it for hours. This is the second white lens in the OM lineup and it totally complements my 150-400mm. Both the PRO designation and white coating to stop overheating indicate that this lens combines the best materials and R&D that OM could muster.

One of my first projects was a goldfinch nest in my neighbor's garden. I was photographing through the window that looks into my next-door apple tree, and I used focus peaking to find the goldfinch and its eye as mum was sitting on the nest. Hand-holding for a long period of time until I got the shot was easy, and the IBIS meant I could slow the shutter speed down. The compact size – only 226mm by 91mm with internal zoom – meant I could easily slip it into my rucksack alongside my thermos for a day's walking.

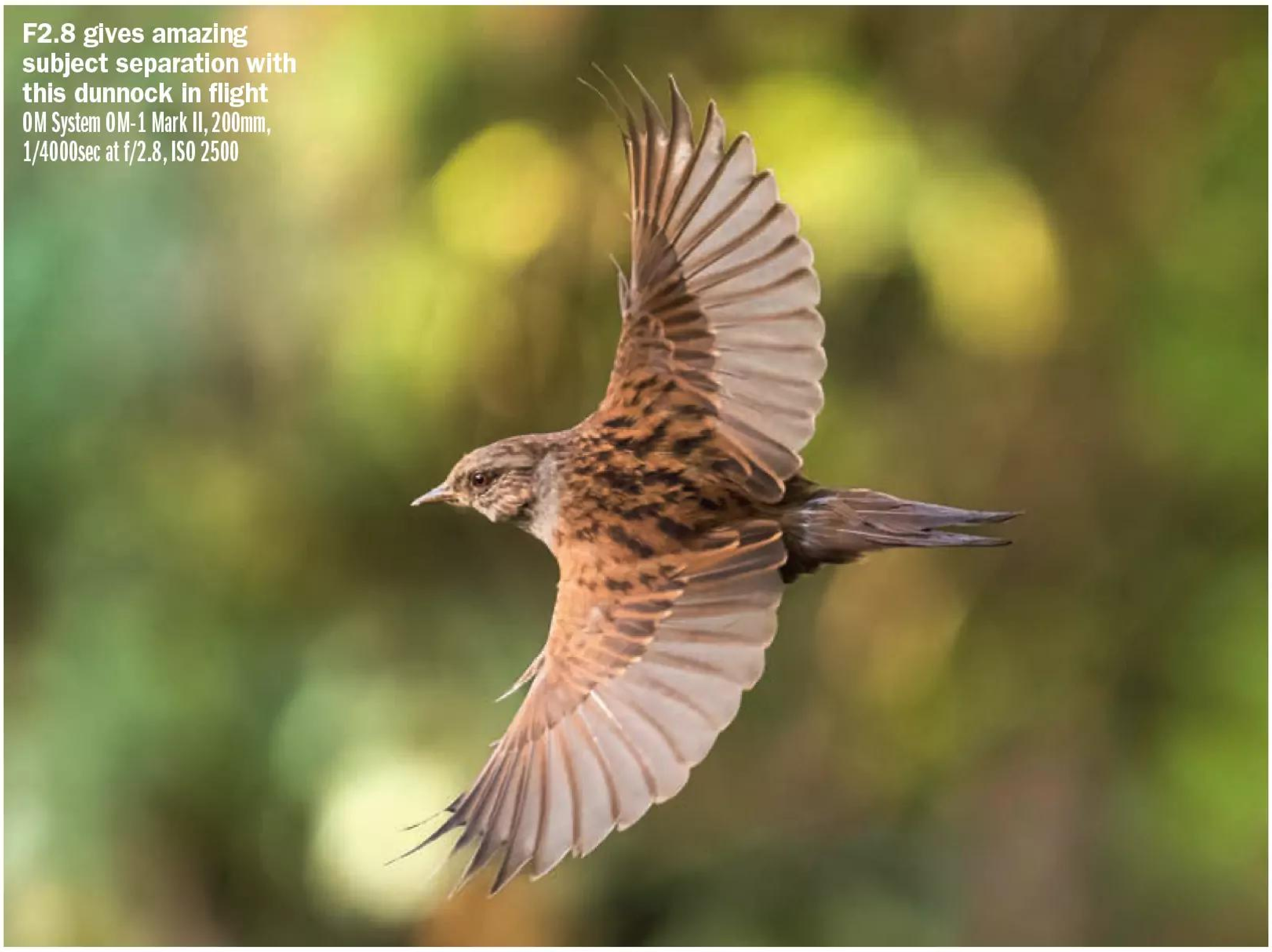
The usual pro-level switches on the side are quick to access, with the focus limiter useful for close detail and distant bird work. If you are working on a tripod and there is a particular perch where birds come in to land, the Preset function allows you to save and instantly recall a specific focus distance with a button press, while the four L-Fn buttons around the barrel are programmable for various functions, including the Preset distance recall. It's the first time I have used this feature and it's incredibly convenient, especially if the spot you are recalling is surrounded by leaves or bushes, and the AF takes a moment to pick up the perch.

Sharp and fast

Of course, a pro-level lens should also be sharp and fast. OM lenses are renowned for their quality; this one is no exception. It's easily up there with my 300mm f/4, which up to now was the sharpest lens I owned. I had the 1.4x extender on most of the time and found little degradation in quality. The lens easily keeps up with bird detection and Pro-Capture, and the amazing 50fps with full autofocus that newer OM bodies deliver does not present any issues, even with small garden birds like the dunnock in my garden.

I decided to head out to the Stiperstones nature reserve and went full tilt by adding the 2x

This lens is perfect for insects in flight
OM System OM-1 Mark II, MC-14, 280mm, 1/5000sec at f/9, ISO 1600


F2.8 gives amazing subject separation with this dunnock in flight
OM System OM-1 Mark II, 200mm, 1/4000sec at f/2.8, ISO 2500

extender which gave me a 200-800mm f/5.6 setup. I spotted a nearby cuckoo and stalked carefully closer, hoping for a take-off moment. I was set to pro-capture with bird AF and caught the gorgeous flare of wings. The laws of physics can't be escaped and yes, there is a little bit of loss in sharpness. But I was pleased with the result.

Backgrounds and bokeh

The criticism often thrown at Micro Four Thirds is that you can't get decent bokeh. Although this has rarely been my experience, here we finally have a lens that can take backgrounds and turn them into a soft, un-distracting dream. At f/2.8 with the dunnock, I am blown away by the backdrop where distant leaves and bushes are perfectly out of focus.

There is one thing that weighs heavily in this argument, and that is the minimum focus distance. My old Canon 100-400mm had an MFD of 0.98m and this lens has an MFD of 0.78m, however with twice the equivalent reach (using the 2x converter), this gets you in very close. And the closer you are, the more the background gets thrown out. At f/2.8, the subject pings out with an almost 3D effect. The point is that this lens not only handles subjects well, but is also considerate of all four corners of the frame. If you put the work in, you will get pleasing results.

Andrew using the OM System 50-200mm f/2.8 on his OM-1 Mark II

Close up

It would be hard to say which area this lens excels at the most, but for my work, it would have to be insects, both portrait shots and flight captures. I love my 40-150mm f/2.8 but to get shots that fill the frame, I often have to get quite close, and this can make the insect fly off. That extra 100mm equivalent reach is a godsend, not only bringing me closer, but giving more of a pleasing background. It is a win-win situation.

Here, the excellent sharpness and lightning-fast AF means I am in with a chance of extraordinary flight sequences, such as with the obliging clouded yellow where colour rendition, tack-sharp butterfly and perfect backdrop all combine. It's also great for letting that f/2.8 aperture give you frames where the focus falls off in an almost impressionist effect.

I have also used hand-held focus stacking with the 2x teleconverter to get incredible detail of spiders, bees and butterfly scales. The IBIS is almost unbelievable and even when setting stacking to 15 frames, as long as there is no breeze and the insect is staying still, the out-of-camera JPEGs can give you front to back depth-of-field. That said, I would still want OM eventually to extend this feature up 30 frames and give you a resulting DNG. While it will not replace my trusty 90mm f/2.8 macro, it does mean that in the field I can swap instantly from flight and portrait to more intense details.

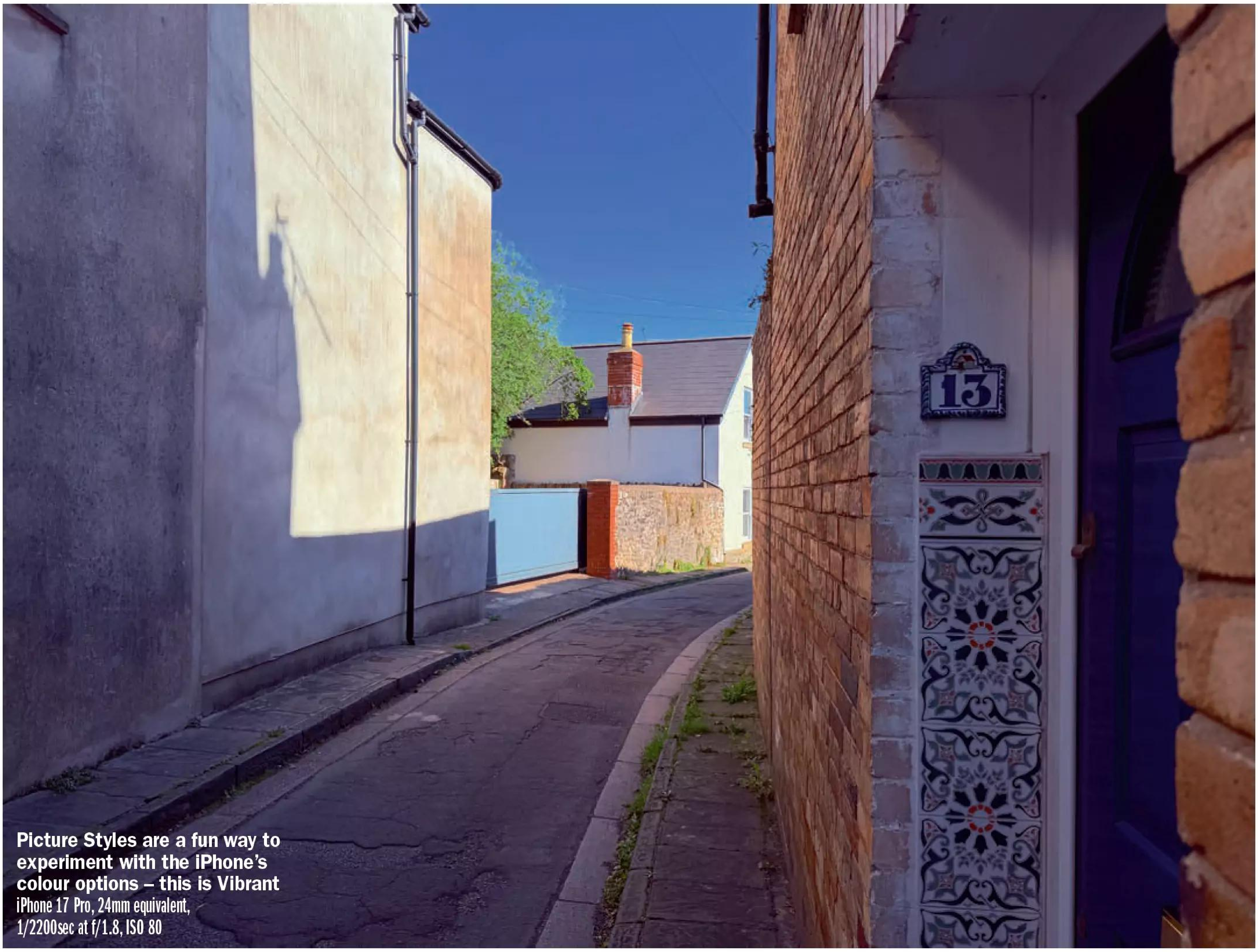
One lens to rule them all

I put a question mark at the beginning of my review, asking if the 50-200mm is indeed an all-terrain vehicle. Yes, there are caveats – for bird photography where subjects are some distance away, of course I would always go for my 150-400mm, while for 2:1 and further macro, I would look elsewhere. But for garden birds, insects of all sorts and days out at bird reserves where the birds are closer, this lens is fabulous. In fact, my 40-150mm f/2.8 has now been put back on the shelf where it is gathering dust.

Is it worth it? The price of £2,999 seems steep, but it is the full-frame equivalent of a 100-400 f/2.8. In size and weight and price, it's a lot cheaper than any 400mm f/2.8 lenses out there. In my mind you get a hell of a lot for your money and for serious wildlife photographers I would say this is quite the game-changer.

Also, there are many areas where I haven't yet taken advantage of its qualities – on safari, or with badgers, foxes and owls at dawn and dusk where that f/2.8 really gives one more latitude. This could also be a great lens for moon and sun and compressed landscape shots, and surely this could also be very useful for sports?

This lens is a real triumph from OM and has filled a very important gap in its lineup. I am excited about the shots that I will achieve in the next few years, and am already seeing some stunning work from the wildlife community. It's five stars from me! AP



Picture Styles are a fun way to experiment with the iPhone's colour options – this is Vibrant
iPhone 17 Pro, 24mm equivalent, 1/2200sec at f/1.8, ISO 80

iPhone 17 Pro

Finally, triple high-resolution cameras and an improved selfie performance. The 17 Pro is the best iPhone camera to date, as **Amy Davies** discovers

Another year, another update to what could lay claim to being the most popular pocket camera in the world. As is often the case, the upgrades found within Apple's iPhone 17 Pro aren't groundbreaking compared to the previous model, but there have been a couple of notable improvements to the camera. Let's take a look and see how these advancements affect the overall photographic performance of the device.

Features

The big new photography upgrades for the 17 Pro are having triple high-resolution 48MP cameras (at last!) and an improved selfie camera. Apple is boasting that this phone offers the biggest 'optical' zoom range of any iPhone, claiming it offers 8x zoom from the telephoto lens. It also says 'it's like having 8 pro lenses in your pocket'. You need to take all this with a very large pinch of salt. The telephoto lens is actually 100mm, or 4x zoom

At a glance

- 48MP main camera, 24mm equivalent, f/1.78
- 48MP ultra-wide, 14mm equivalent, f/2.2
- 48MP telephoto, 100mm equivalent, f/2.8
- 18MP 'Center Stage' selfie camera
- 4K 120p video
- 6.3in Super Retina XDR OLED screen
- Aluminium unibody design
- Apple A19 Pro Processor

compared to the main lens. This is actually a reduction from the 120mm (5x) of the iPhone 16 Pro. Even so, the new telephoto camera is perhaps the biggest upgrade, with its 48MP sensor being not only a big jump in resolution but also being 56% physically larger.

So what's this about 8x then? Well, that's 'optical quality' rather than actual 'optical'. You get 200mm equivalent by using the central 12MP portion of the sensor. We've seen this before from the main camera, which also has a 2x 'optical quality' setting you can use. Other smartphones on the market, such as the Google Pixel 10, offer the same kind of 'optical quality' zooming.

As for the '8 pro lenses' claim, Apple gets to that by counting the three physical lenses, with an additional five coming from the macro setting, the 1.2, 1.5 and 2x settings from the main camera, and the 8x setting from the telephoto camera. It's pretty obvious that '8 pro lenses' is a bit of a stretch here, but it's still good to have that flexibility.

The new selfie camera has again seen a bump in resolution, to 18MP. But the big draw here is the new square sensor, which gives it the ability to do some fun tricks such as expanding the field of view to get more (or less) of the background in, changing from landscape to portrait without having to physically move the phone's orientation, and automatic field of view widening if additional people join you in the shot. You can also record dual capture video (where the front camera and the rear camera both record at the same time).

iPhone cameras have always had a good array of high-end video functionality, most of which will no doubt be completely ignored by the average user. Still, if you want it, there's professional-level features such as ProRes RAW, AppleLog 2 and genlock. For everybody else, there's 4K recording at up to 120fps, as well as Cinematic (shallow depth-of-field) recording.

Handling and design

There are two varieties of iPhone 17 Pro. In this review I'm using the 6.3in version, but there's also the 17 Pro Max which has a 6.9in screen. Which size screen you prefer is purely down to hand size and personal taste – I prefer the more petite offering. Unlike in some previous years, there's no 'punishment' in terms of the camera setup for opting for the smaller screen. Therefore, the bulk of this review effectively covers both devices.

There have been some changes to the design of the iPhone 17 Pro when compared to its predecessor. The cameras are now housed in what Apple is calling a 'plateau': basically a bar covering the full width of the phone's back. Some other components have also been moved into the plateau, such as the antennae, leaving more room for a bigger battery. There's also a new vapour chamber to dissipate heat, which could be useful for anyone recording lots of 4K video. Apple itself doesn't disclose battery figures in terms of mAh ratings, but says that the iPhone 17 Pro can playback video for 31 hours, compared to 27 hours for the iPhone 16 Pro.

Both fast charging and wireless charging are available. A battery charger doesn't come in the box, and you'll need a 40W or higher charger to enjoy fast charging. Likwise, you'll need something MagSafe compatible to charge wirelessly.

The previous iPhone 16 Pro boasted a titanium construction. For the 17 series, Apple has gone back to aluminium, but it's now a 'unibody' so it's still claimed to be very strong. Further boosting the phone's tough credentials is the fact that it has Ceramic Shield both front and back, where previously only the screen enjoyed this benefit. The 17 Pro has an IP68 rating for water- and dust-proofing, the same as the previous model.

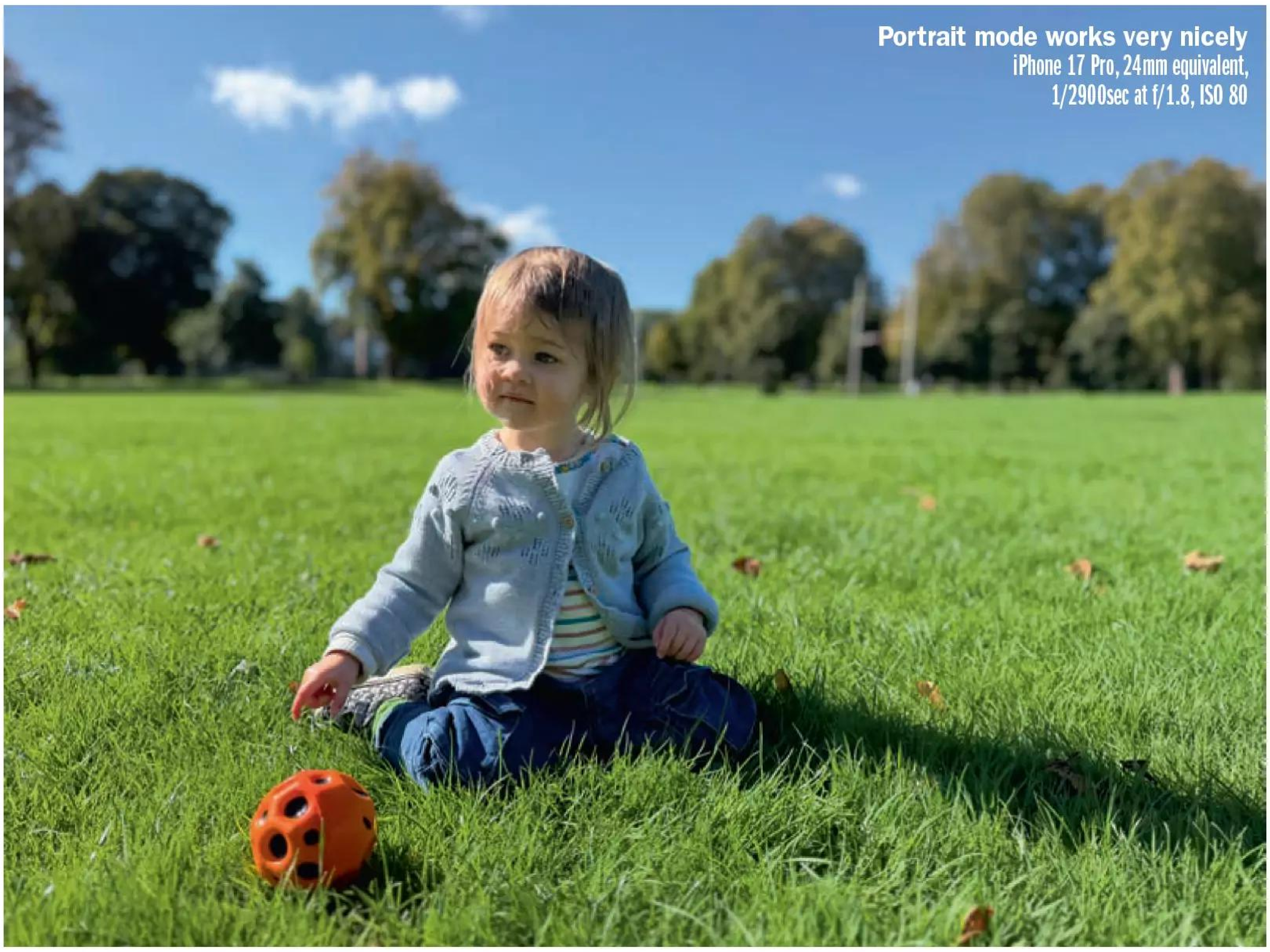
In terms of resolution, refresh rate and size, the Super Retina XDR screen is the same as the iPhone 16 Pro. So that's 2622 x 1206 pixels, 120Hz and 6.3-inches. There has been an improvement to the brightness however, as it now maxes out at 3,000 nits, compared to 2,000 nits before. It's also got better anti-reflection, too. Although the screen size is the same, the body of the phone is slightly bigger and heavier than before, but it's not enough to be hugely noticeable.

Both the Action Button and the Camera Control button return, on the left and right-hand sides of the phone, respectively. The Action Button can be assigned to activate the camera, and I find myself using this all the time. The Camera Control button can be used for a variety of options, including moving between various camera lenses, zooming, switching between different photographic styles and more. You can also use it to take a shot. I'm not personally a huge fan, as I find it a little bit fiddly, especially once you've got a case on the phone. But others may find it useful.

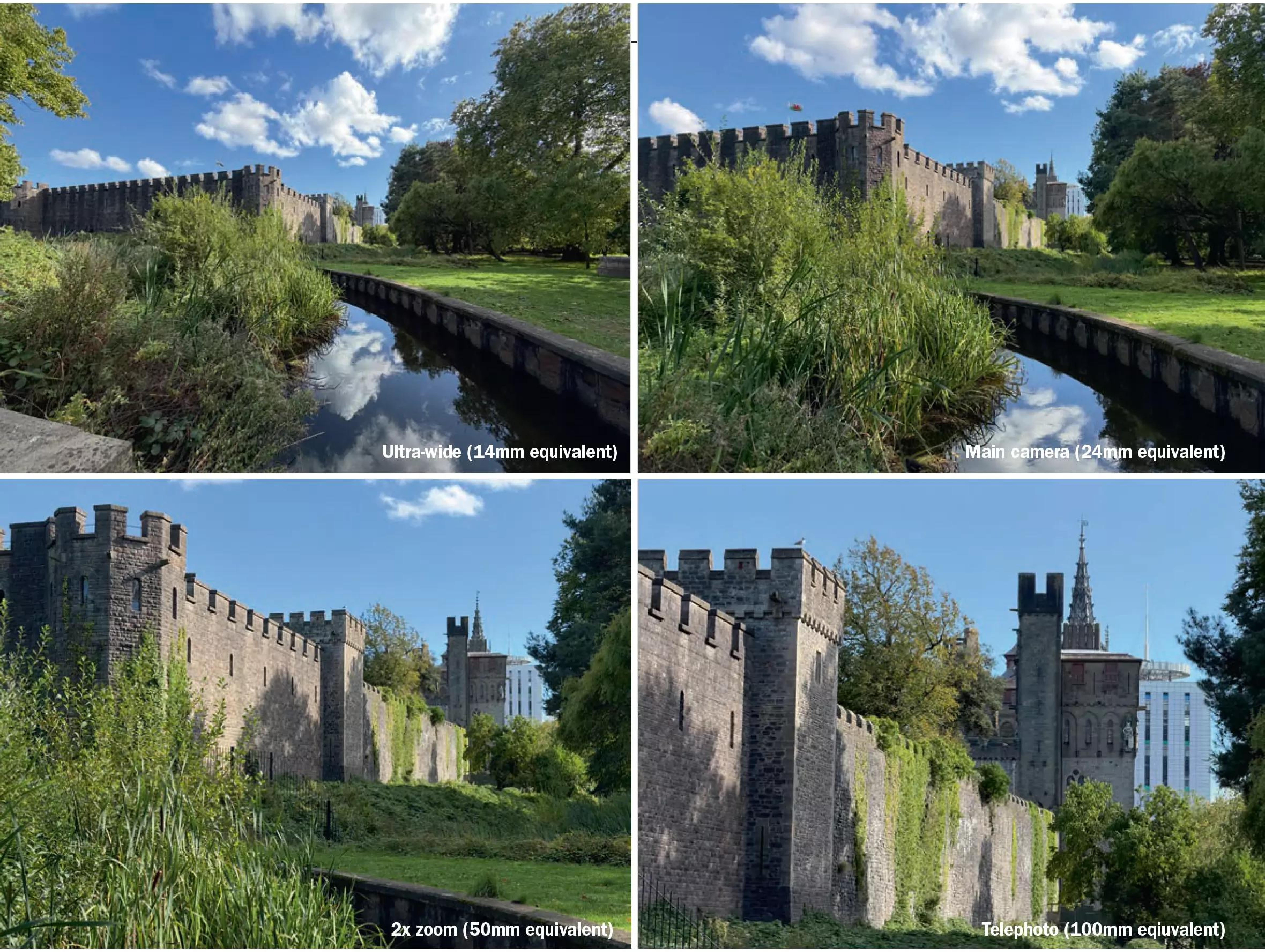
Camera app

The native camera app has been rejigged for iOS 26, bringing some changes to the camera interface. On the whole, though, it remains fairly simple. Sadly, we still see no sign of a 'Pro' or 'Advanced' mode, but there are dozens of apps which allow you to control shutter speed and ISO if you so desire.

A number of different modes can be used, but the default option is Photo. This gives you access to all the different lenses (and digital / crop options in between), as well as things



Portrait mode works very nicely
iPhone 17 Pro, 24mm equivalent, 1/2900sec at f/1.8, ISO 80


Ultra-wide (14mm equivalent)

Main camera (24mm equivalent)

2x zoom (50mm equivalent)

Telephoto (100mm eqiuvalent)

This comparison shows the angles of view of the three main lenses, plus the 2x 'optical quality' zoom from the main camera

such as Photographic Styles for changing the look of your shots. Some additional options can be found in the top right hand corner including exposure compensation, aspect ratio and flash.

There is a Portrait mode for shooting shallow-depth-of-field effects. As we've seen for a couple of generations now, the phone should automatically recognise when a person or a pet (dog or cat) is in the frame and give you the option to quickly turn on Portrait shooting. Or, even more cleverly, you can turn standard Photos into Portrait shots after the fact. This is something I use all the time when taking pictures of my daughters, as I've often quickly grabbed a shot while they're on the move and don't always remember to switch on Portrait mode.

Night mode remains an automatic option, not something you can manually choose to switch on or off. It should kick in when the phone notices that there's not much light in the scene. Macro shooting is also automatic, activating when you bring the phone close to a subject. Apple uses the ultra-wide camera for close-up shots, cropping the image to 12MP.

One key difference is that the Photo and Video modes are displayed as two separate sections, giving you the option to quickly jump between them. As before, you can hold down the shutter button to grab a quick video when in Photo mode, too. Other shooting modes such as panoramic are included, but there's not as many as we see on a typical Android phone.

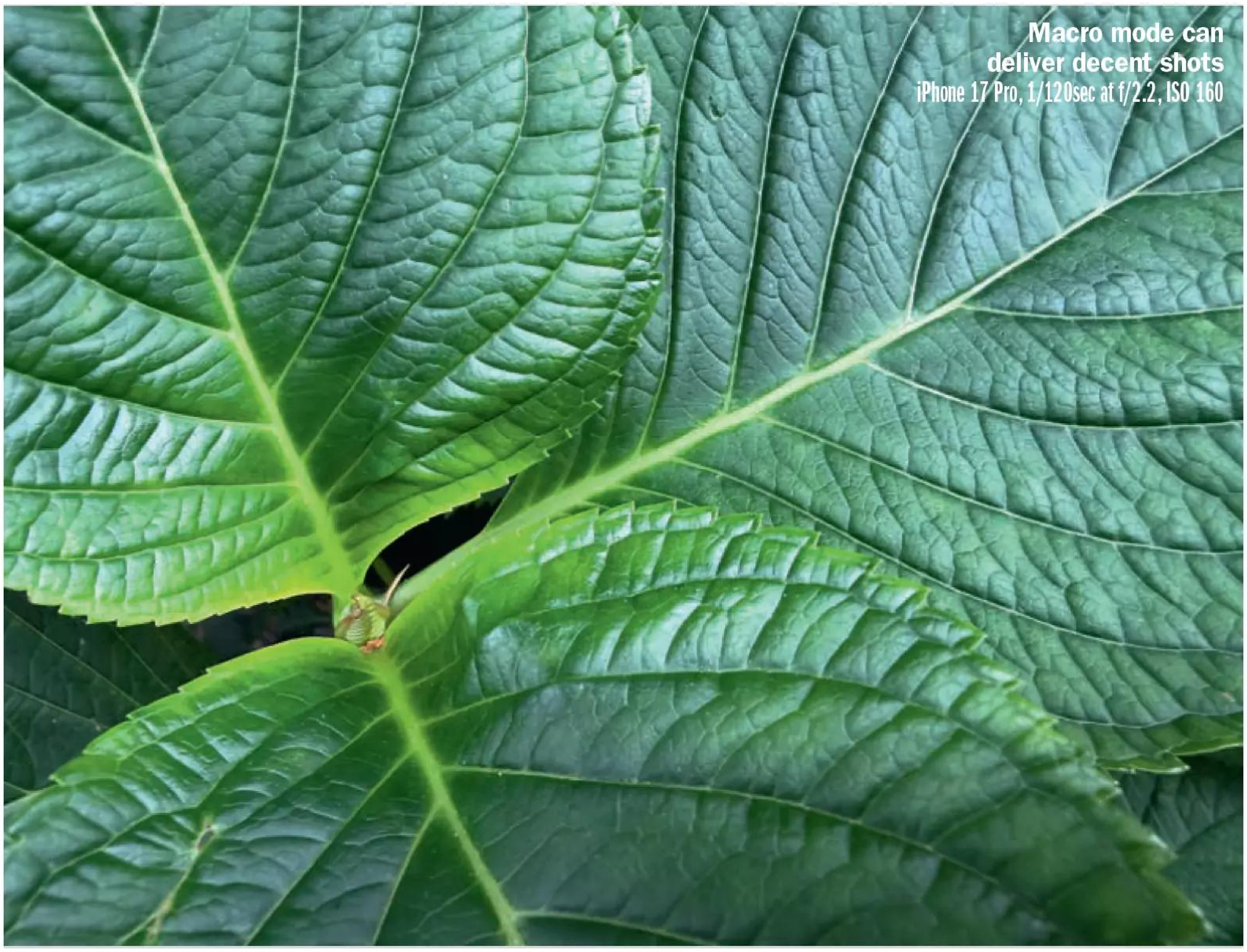
Flip to the front camera and you'll see a new icon for rotating to horizontal format, without having to physically rotate the phone. You can also set it to automatically zoom and rotate if people join or leave the selfie, too. A fun new feature is the Dual Capture option which records both the selfie camera and the rear camera at the same time, so you can narrate your surroundings. The box with your own face in can be placed in any of the four corners of the recording, but note that you can't move it after the fact in editing. This is a shame if you realise that it's obscuring something important.

By default, you can shoot images in HEIF (High Efficiency Image Format) or RAW directly within the app. You can also shoot in the more widely compatible JPEG format, but you'll need to head to the main settings menu for that. These days, I shoot in HEIF to save space – it's easy enough to convert an image if you need to, and all the major apps (such as WhatsApp and Instagram) know what to do with HEIFs.

For video, there's the standard option, plus such things as Time-Lapse, and Slo-Mo. You can quickly switch between different frame rates and resolutions, as well as switching on the more advanced options such as ProRes recording.

Performance

Another year rolls around and it's another year of me saying that once again, the top-line iPhone takes excellent photos. Of course it does, it did last year and the year before that. The iPhone 17 Pro is great, but so were the



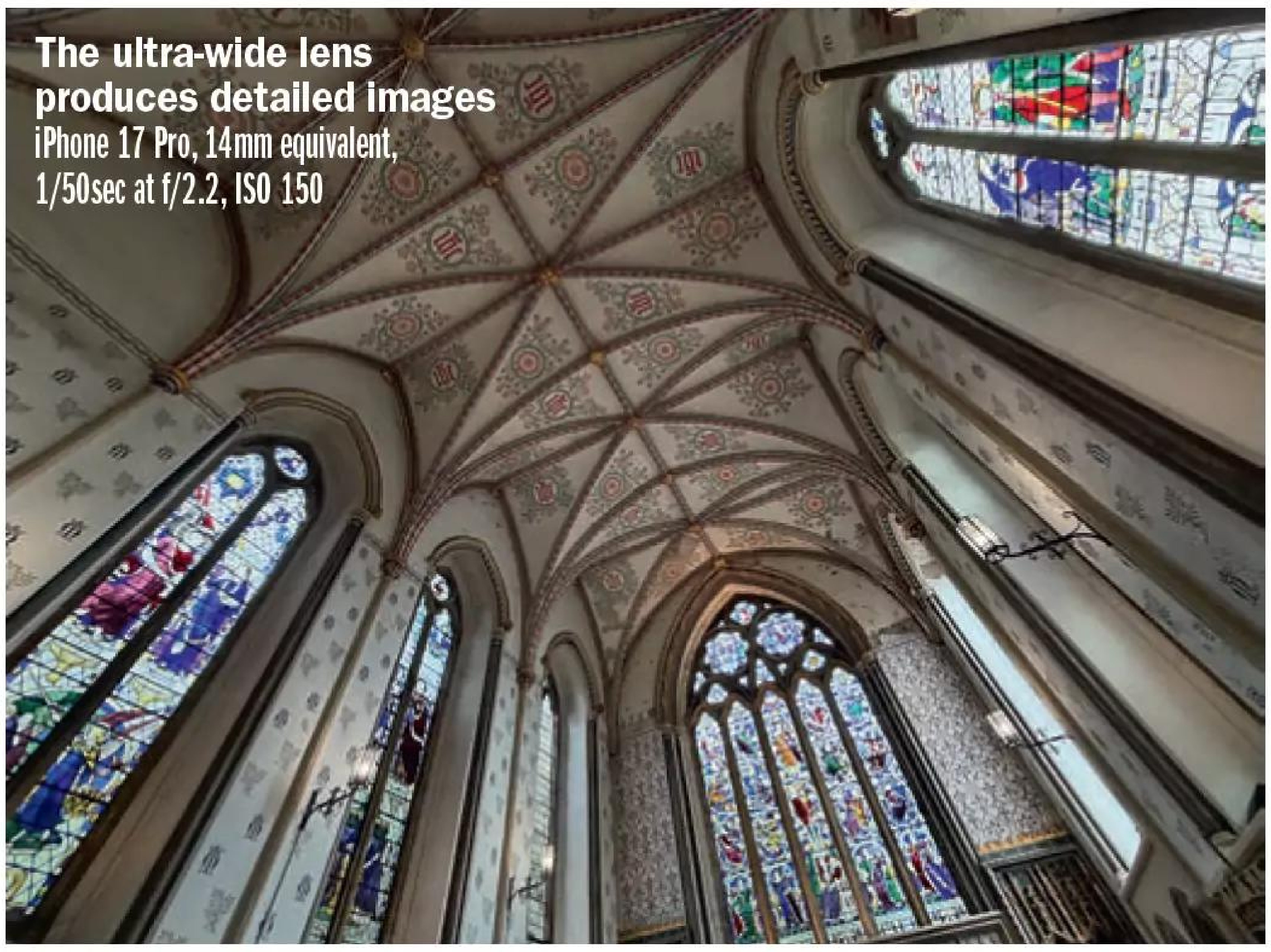
Macro mode can deliver decent shots
iPhone 17 Pro, 1/120sec at f/2.2, ISO 160

16 Pro and iPhone 15 Pro. You'll probably need to be jumping up from a model older than that to notice any huge difference in image quality, though there are some key improvements.

The telephoto lens is now 48MP, compared to last year's 12MP. You can see some extra detail resolved with the iPhone 17 Pro's lens, but it's really only noticeable if you zoom in closely and really look for it. What the 48MP gives you better scope to do is crop though, which is where the promised 8x 'optical quality' option comes in. And yeah, that's pretty good – certainly good enough for a phone screen, and for viewing or printing at small sizes.

On the whole, all three of the lenses perform extremely well – certainly in good light. Detail is very well resolved, exposures are well balanced, and the colours are nice and vibrant. You can experiment with different colour treatments using Picture Styles, which is quite fun too. I sometimes like to shoot in black & white, even if I then revert to colour at a later stage.

Portrait mode is very good, albeit sometimes still struggling a bit with fussy hair. This can mean that it's quite obviously a fake bokeh setting if you look closely, but overall the effect is quite good. Meanwhile the new selfie camera can produce some lovely results, and you can see a little more detail than in previous generations.



The ultra-wide lens produces detailed images
iPhone 17 Pro, 14mm equivalent, 1/50sec at f/2.2, ISO 150

Night mode puts in a good performance too, with both the wide and the ultra-wide displaying good levels of detail in very dark conditions; but I can't see any dramatic improvement from the iPhone 16 Pro.

You can get some great close-ups using the macro mode. However, the results are much the same as the previous model, and we're also seeing much better macro options from phones which use the telephoto lenses – a particular favourite of mine is the Xiaomi 15 Ultra. Still, the results should be good enough for most.

Video is captured very well, with nicely smooth shots, even when walking and recording at the same time. You can switch on the Action Mode if you want even smoother shots. Detail and exposure is also generally well-rendered, too. AP

Verdict

THE IPHONE 17 Pro is a great smartphone camera, being able to take excellent images and video. As I say pretty much every year, though, it doesn't represent a huge evolution in terms of the camera. There are a couple of good improvements, such as finally having three high-resolution sensors, and a long-overdue upgrade to the selfie camera. I also really liked the option to capture selfies horizontally without rotating the phone from holding it vertically.

Elsewhere, the battery life improvements, anti-reflective coating, and screen are all nice to have. But they may not be quite enough to tempt you if you already have an iPhone 16 Pro or 15 Pro. The new design with the camera plateau is more striking than previous generations, but it also looks a bit odd. I'm not entirely convinced by the vibrant orange colour, either, and would have loved to have seen some of the cuter pastel colours the cheaper iPhone 17 offers.

Many who love iPhones would not consider switching to Android. But for photographers, it remains true that there are other models which offer more. The Xiaomi 15 Ultra is still my current favourite, while the Samsung S25 Ultra is also a very solid performer, too.

One thing I've always liked about the iPhone Pro series is that it comes in two sizes, which you just don't get with Android. You don't have to put up with a poorer camera system if you want a smaller screen. Most of this review could be about the iPhone 17 Pro Max as well as the iPhone 17 Pro – I happen to prefer the handling of a smaller device, and it's a bit cheaper too. Which you prefer is up to personal taste. Overall, it's fair to say that the iPhone 17 Pro is the best iPhone yet.

Amateur Photographer Testbench Recommended ★★★★½

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This lens combines superb sharpness with aesthetically pleasing out-of-focus backgrounds
Panasonic Lumix S1RII, 1/2500sec at f/1.4, ISO 250

Sigma 135mm F1.4 DG Art

The world's fastest 135mm AF lens delivers some quite remarkable images, says **Damien Demolder**, that are impossible to shoot any other way

I wonder how much the 135mm focal length is on the radar of anyone other than portrait photographers. It isn't really considered a 'regular' lens, but it has a unique position between the 'moderate telephotos' at the 70mm/85mm/105mm mark, and what I'd consider 'long telephotos' from 180mm onwards. The 150mm sits in about the same area, but we don't see too many of those either, these days.

There's a special place in my heart for the 135mm, as my third interchangeable lens was a Pentax 135mm f/3.5 for my Chinon CM4. I had what I considered to be some success with it at college and it played a significant part in the beginnings of my love of street photography. So when this new Sigma version was announced, it had my attention immediately.

But on reflection, I realised that as much as I used to love that focal length, I haven't used a 135mm fixed lens for a very long time. With its dramatically wide maximum aperture of f/1.4 and Sigma's recent excellent performance in my head, I was ready to love this £1,649 lens before I'd even requested it for review. And that's not a healthy position for a reviewer to take.

Features

This new Sigma Art lens is designed specifically for full-frame mirrorless cameras and comes in versions for the Leica L mount or Sony's E mount

This lens is especially well suited to shooting portraits
Panasonic Lumix S1RII, 1/320sec at f/1.4, ISO 1250

– this example is for L and was tested on the Lumix S1R II. The great attraction, of course, is that f/1.4 maximum aperture, which is a whole 2/3rd of a stop larger than the f/1.8 lens that came before it. I suspect the 1.66x more light entering the lens may be less of a draw for most photographers than the reduced depth-of-field and enhanced subject isolation that this super-wide maximum aperture will achieve.

Long wide-aperture lenses like this have been somewhat prone to chromatic separations in the past, that leave some wavelengths unfocused and/or coloured fringes about high contrast edges. But Sigma assures us that its use of four elements made in its Fluorite-like FLD glasses and two aspherical elements will avoid this and deliver sharpness and clarity right across the frame.

That massive f/1.4 maximum aperture is achieved using a 13-bladed iris. It closes to f/16, via in-camera controls or by the manual ring on the lens that can click at 1/3rd stop intervals, or not at all once the ring is de-clicked.

Heavier lenses like this can put a strain on a camera's mount, so Sigma provides us with a tripod foot to take the weight away from the camera. This is moulded with an Arca-Swiss fitting that will slide directly into tripod heads designed for this standard. The collar's restraining knob can be loosened to allow the lens to rotate or for the foot to be removed entirely.

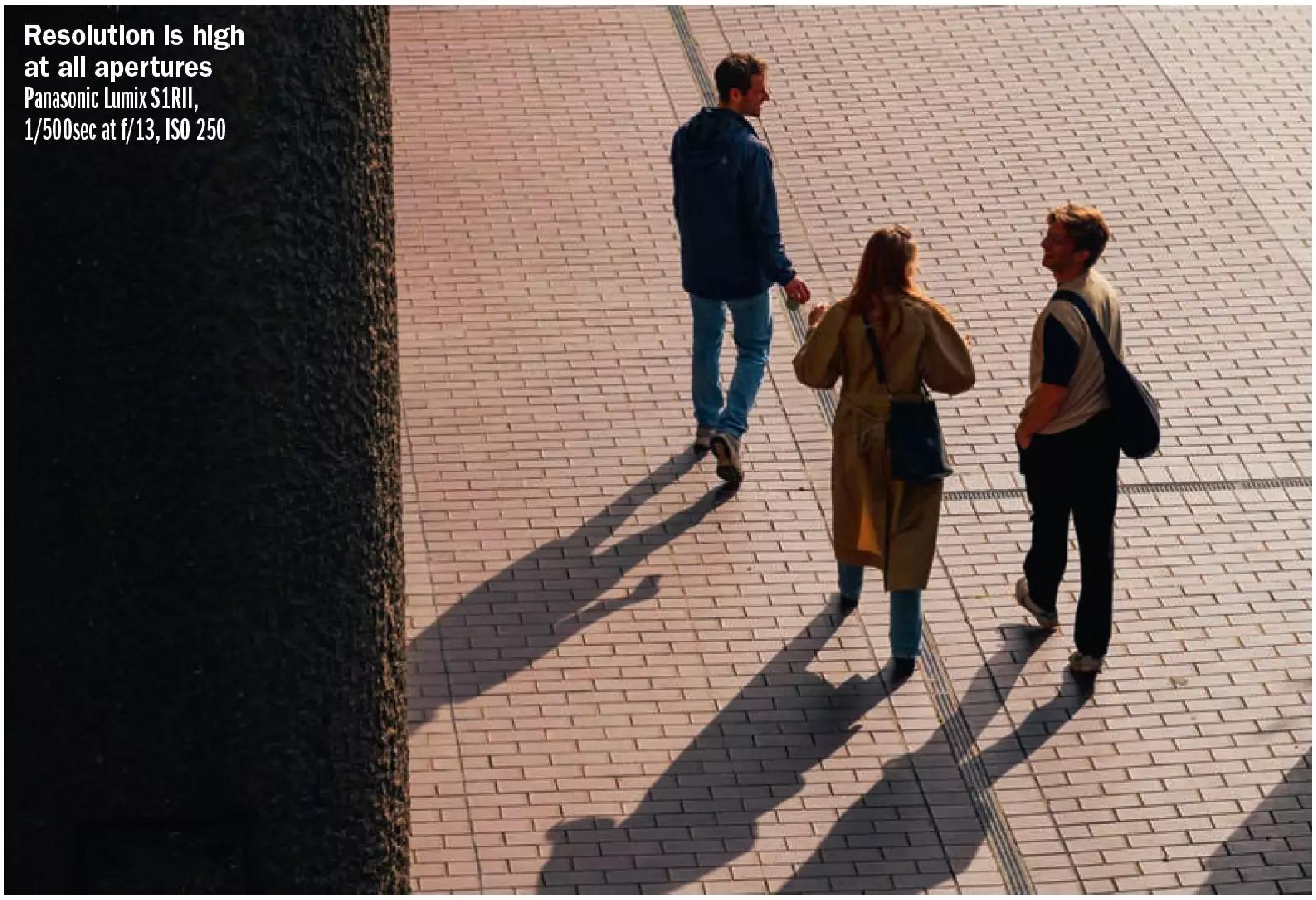
Images are sharp and clean at f/1.4
Panasonic Lumix S1RII
1/1600sec at f/1.4, ISO 400

Build and handling

Sigma has been making its Art series since 2012, and has garnered plenty of experience in the manufacture of lenses that have a premium feel and finish. My test sample arrived clothed in bubble wrap and without the usual fancy packaging. But even nestled in its bed of polystyrene chips in a humble brown box, it was able to provoke a feeling of confidence in me that I was in for a very good experience.

The lens is thickset and solid like a bulldog's head, and it weighs more than its size might indicate – it requires a degree of force to lift that surprised me almost every time I picked it up. With a 105mm front element one might expect all that weight to be shifted to the front of the barrel, but Sigma has managed to find a way to position the weight in the middle of the construction so it sits over the thread on the tripod foot.

For the reviewer looking for new things to write about, Sigma's standardisation of the Art lens layout is a little frustrating. But for the user, it presents a consistency across the range that means you'll know where everything is without having to take your eye from the viewfinder, whichever lens is mounted on your camera. This 135mm f/1.4 has the usual AF/MF sliding switch, a click/declick slider for the aperture ring, and a lock for that ring so it can be restrained in the manual range or in Auto mode. We have a pair of custom buttons that can be customised to activate one of 18 settings in the camera, such



Resolution is high at all apertures
Panasonic Lumix S1RII, 1/500sec at f/13, ISO 250

as AF modes, AF/AE lock and depth-of-field preview.

Once you are over the weight of the lens, you'll find it very comfortable to use. But when hand-holding, you'll need to adjust your grip, so the left hand is supporting the lens. Otherwise it will be too much to handle for a long shoot.

Autofocus

The lens uses a pair of floating focus groups to help shift the right amount of glass inside the barrel. This allows it to find focus quickly and with as little breathing as possible.

And it works.

I used the lens on the Lumix S1R II and S5 to see how it performed being driven by both phase detection and contrast detection systems, and I found it extremely able in either case. That Panasonic's DFD contrast-detection system may not have a great reputation stems primarily from difficulties in low light and with fast-moving subjects when tracking is required. But in bright light with a contrasty scene, the system is extremely fast – and this lens did nothing to hamper performance in such conditions.

With moving subjects and phase detection I had good success too. But while that f/1.4 aperture lets in a lot of light to help AF systems, its diminutive depth-of-field demands a degree of accuracy that's hard to satisfy. The hit rate wasn't 100%, but I suspect the camera/user has more to answer for than the lens.

> 'You'll find it really very nicely sharp at all apertures and right across the frame'

Image quality

The short answer to the Image Quality question is that the Sigma 135mm F1.4 is very good and you won't be disappointed. In more detail, you'll find it really very nicely sharp at all apertures and right across the frame.

Clearly, with a headline-grabbing maximum aperture, Sigma has put a lot of effort into the optical performance of this lens at the wider apertures. While the pinnacle of its detail-gathering power may not be at f/1.4, you may need to compare f/1.4 images with those shot in the middle of the range to see that things can get even better. For central and corner resolution f/4 is the way to go – which is where some 135mm lenses start their aperture range.

Images shot at f/1.4 are very nicely detailed, and while they might lack some of the contrast of the middle apertures, few will find they fall short. My test charts show me that f/2.8 is where things really tighten up and that quality drops off again at f/16, where resolution isn't as good as it is at f/1.4. But in real-life shooting, you'll be delighted all the way through the range.

Some people these days are happy to put up with poor resolution and horrific chromatic aberrations so long as the bokeh of the lens in question is 'amazeballs'. But in this lens, you get excellent technical performance alongside aesthetically pleasing out-of-focus areas. At f/1.4 we get a lot of out-of-focus areas in our pictures, so it's important they look nice. Focus transitions are beautifully smooth, while highlights are clean and rounded and will not distract from the subject.

On high-contrast edges at f/1.4, you might find a tiny amount of colour separation if you look hard enough. But thanks to the L-Mount Alliance's integrated software corrections, there's no vignetting or distortion to speak of. AP

Verdict

I LOVED my Pentax 135mm f/3.5 very much, but when I put it on a digital camera, I discovered it wasn't nearly as sharp as I thought. I still like it, but I suspect my love of this Sigma lens will be a little more enduring.

I love the angle of view of a 135mm, and I love the subject isolating qualities of an f/1.4 aperture, and in this lens I can have both. Crucially, though, I can have both without the usual costs of a fast telephoto – poor resolution wide open and chromatic fringing on high-contrast edges.

I suspect a lot of photographers will buy this lens for portraiture, which it is very good at, but it is also useful for street, travel and general photography. Sigma has done a great job with this model, and has created a lens that's as lovely to look through as it is lovely to inspect its images close-up. The impact of that shallow depth-of-field really helps images to stand out, and the creaminess of the out-of-focus areas brings a level of sophistication we have no right to expect at this price.

I was ready to like this lens before I got hold of it, but have used it with as much scepticism as I could muster. And I've found it's as good as I had hoped.

Data file

Price	£1,649
Filter diameter	105mm
Lens elements	17
Groups	13
Diaphragm blades	13
Aperture	f/1.4-16
Min focus	110cm
Length	135.5mm
Diameter	111.7mm
Weight	1,430g
Lens mount	Leica L and Sony E
Included accessories	Tripod foot, lens hood, pouch, strap

Amateur Photographer Testbench GOLD ★★★★★

Neewer CSF10

This softer alternative to a spotlight proves a versatile lighting modifier, says **Damien Demolder**

● £199 ● neewer.com

Most AP readers will have seen a Fresnel lens, but few will actually own one – or know why they might need one. You'll have seen them on the sides of lighthouses: with their concentric grooved rings, they turn the general spread of the lamp into the straight beams that streak out over the sea. Placing a Fresnel lens in front of a photographic light does the same thing: it collimates the light into a beam to produce an effect like a spotlight, but softer.

The Neewer CSF10 is a large plastic barrel that fits onto a Bowens-mount light, with a 25cm grooved Fresnel lens at the other end. Its central barrel rotates to push the lens away from the source, which alters the angle of the beam. The lens housing itself doesn't rotate, so the barn doors can remain in place as we adjust.

The Fresnel lens concentrates all the light from your flash or LED into a narrower and brighter beam. In my tests, a light that delivered f/3.5 with no modifier was boosted to between f/6.3 and f/8 with the lens at its widest and narrowest positions.

The CSF10 costs a bit more than similar attachments at the budget end of the market, but that's because they suggest we use lights no brighter than 300W. In contrast, this one allows lights of up to 600W to be used. I used it on a 600W Neewer AS600B pretty much all day, and I found that the CSF10 wasn't really hot at the end of it. It was warm, but safe to touch, thanks to its heat-resistant plastic and fibreglass build.

With the barn doors attached, this is a pretty heavy unit, and it requires a light with a yoke that can handle the weight without straining. On the AS600B this was no problem at all, but I noted the grippy rubber straining a bit when it was mounted on the smaller CB300B – it held, but not comfortably. The CSF10 could really do with its own bracket to shift the balance, just as a heavy camera lens would have its own tripod foot.

Verdict

This really is a useful accessory to spice-up your lighting without going to a whole lot of expense. The effect is a lot softer than a true spotlight, so it lends itself to portraiture as well as the more obvious product work: lighting a set, being positioned outside a window to emulate sunshine, or for creating spots and streaks to liven up a background. The brightness magnification is also very useful, as it means even low-powered lights can be effective. It opens a whole new world of effects for flash and continuous lighting.

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Barn doors
A set of barn doors give us another dimension of control for the spread and quality of light.

Cooling
Large vents at the rear let in air to keep the device cool.

NEEWER
High temperature

Beam angle
The beam narrows from 35° wide to a 10° spot with the lens at its furthest position.

Carry case
The CSF10 comes in a very nice hat-box style padded protective case, but the barn doors have to be carried separately.

Amateur Photographer
Testbench
Recommended
★★★★½

At a glance

- Zooming Fresnel lens for spotlight effects
- Bowens mount
- Compatible with LED lights up to 600W
- Barn doors included in kit
- 288x143mm, 2.65kg

The CSF10 was used to add interest to the background

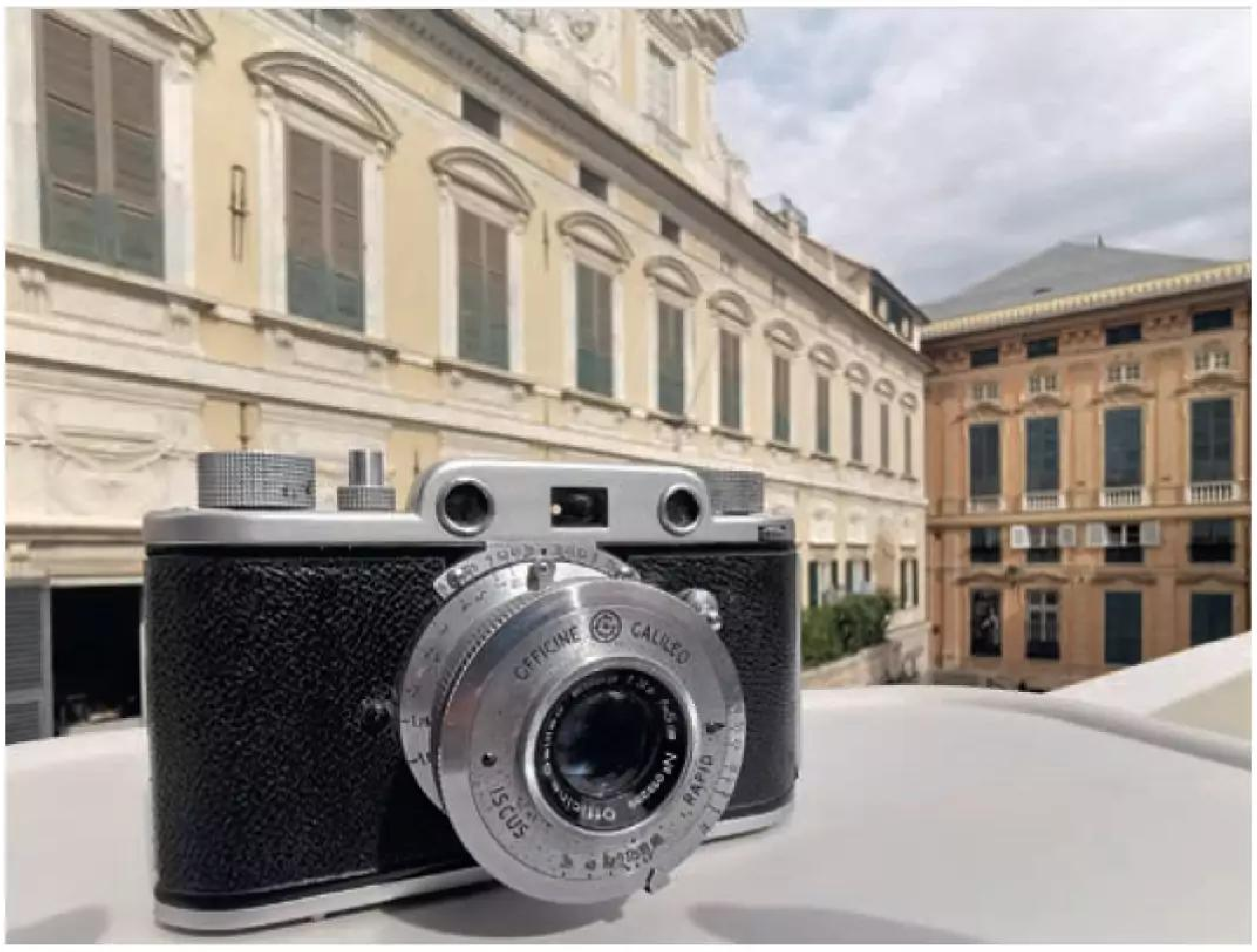
Tony Kemplen on the ...

Ferrania Condor

An Italian camera bought on an Italian holiday

I'm currently experiencing a feeling of déjà vu. Back in 2013 I wrote this column while sitting in the departure lounge at Milan Airport. Earlier in the week I'd bought a Bencini Koroll II camera for 5 euros in the flea market, then loaded it with a film I'd brought with me and photographed some Milanese scenes. I'm now in another Italian airport, this time Genoa, and history is repeating itself. Sometimes I set myself a loose theme for my holiday photography, and this time, in an act akin to taking coals to Newcastle, I'd packed four Italian cameras for the trip. It looks like I'll be returning with five!

Again, at the local flea market I'd spotted an unfamiliar camera. The Ferrania Condor is one of the rag-bag of cameras that are sometimes labelled as Leica clones. There is certainly a passing resemblance to the Leica II series, with the three windows above the lens, which like with the Leica, collapses into the body when not in use. The main difference is that the lens is not interchangeable, and a leaf shutter is used rather than the focal-plane shutter in the Leica.



Tony's Ferrania Condor posing for its photo in Genoa

A quick inspection showed that the rangefinder didn't appear to be working, but the shutter seemed okay and the condition was reasonable. The seller was asking 70 euros for it, I offered her 40, and we settled on 50. Subsequent Googling suggested that I hadn't overpaid. The problem now was that I didn't have a spare film with me. There was only one option, so I stood down my Durst Automatica, and transferred the half-used film to my new acquisition.

In the UK, Ferrania was probably best known for its films rather than its cameras. As a teenager in the 1970s, I cut my teeth on home processed Ferrania CR50 slide film. This wasn't renowned for its quality, but cost a lot less than Ektachrome and the like. Many of the cameras the firm did sell, including the Condor, were simply marketed by Ferrania having been manufactured by an outside company, in this case Officina Gallileo. My collection includes a Ferrania Astor, which is a reasonably specified 120 roll-film camera, and I've also got the more basic Ibis 44 and Tanit 127 format offerings. But this is my first 35mm model from the company.

The old centre of Genoa is a maze of narrow streets, so when I went wandering to take some photos the next day, I wasn't entirely surprised to find myself back at the flea market. A storm was brewing and the stall holders were packing away their wares, among them the person who sold me the camera. She was happy for me to take a photo of her, but the light was so bad that I had to use 1/25th second at f/4.5 leaving little latitude for focus errors or camera shake. I hesitated to use this for publication, but it does form part of the story, so apologies for the poor image quality.

A street portrait taken in poor light using the Condor

See more of Tony's photos on **Instagram @tonykemplen** or at **flickr.com/tony_kemplen**

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LETTER OF THE WEEK

Bridging the gap

A painful frozen shoulder had temporarily put paid to my photography, leaving my beloved Nikon D300S inside its case for several frustrating weeks. Then a friend offered to lend me his Panasonic Lumix FZ330 bridge camera, as it had an articulated screen which I could use at waist level with no need to raise the camera to my eye, thus saving me agonising pain from my dicky shoulder. At first I was sceptical about using a bridge camera but I soon realised that it was just the camera snob in me. The Panasonic is an amazing little camera. Using it at waist-level for various different subjects, it produced beautifully sharp and well-exposed pictures time and time again. And to just be out taking photos again felt wonderful, so much so that I bought a second-hand one for myself. I will return to my faithful old D300S, but the FZ330 really surprised me. Never again will I speak ill of bridge cameras – they can produce top-notch photos.
Terence Armstrong

LETTER OF THE WEEK WINS A SAMSUNG 256GB PRO PLUS MICRO SDXC CARD. NOTE: PRIZE APPLIES TO UK RESIDENTS ONLY

Win! SAMSUNG

A Samsung 256GB PRO Plus MicroSDXC memory card with SD Adapter offers up to 180MB/s read and 130MB/s write speeds, ideal for high-res photos and 4K video. 6-proof protection (water, temperature, X-ray, magnet, drop, wearout) and a 10-year limited warranty. Visit **www.samsung.com/uk/memory-storage-devices/**

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© JEFF ALDRIDGE

This was taken by long-time AP reader Jeff

My slimmed-down kit

I've been buying AP since 1965, and since then I have swelled your coffers significantly. I have suffered the same fate as Rick Corbishley and his Gear Acquisition Syndrome (11 November) since inheriting my dad's Kodak Retina. I did O and A level photography in the 1970s with a Leica CL and three lenses, and progressed through Nikon to Olympus, also film, ever increasing the size of my kit. In my fifties I went digital, firstly with a D200, but when I found that my camera bag weighed more than my luggage on a holiday I decided I had to review the situation.

I now own a Fujifilm X-T5 plus a 75mm equivalent lens for portraits, a 30mm equivalent lens for getting in amongst the people and, as my son plays cricket, a 100-300mm zoom. That's it, apart from my phone, which is the best pocket camera ever.
Jeff Aldridge

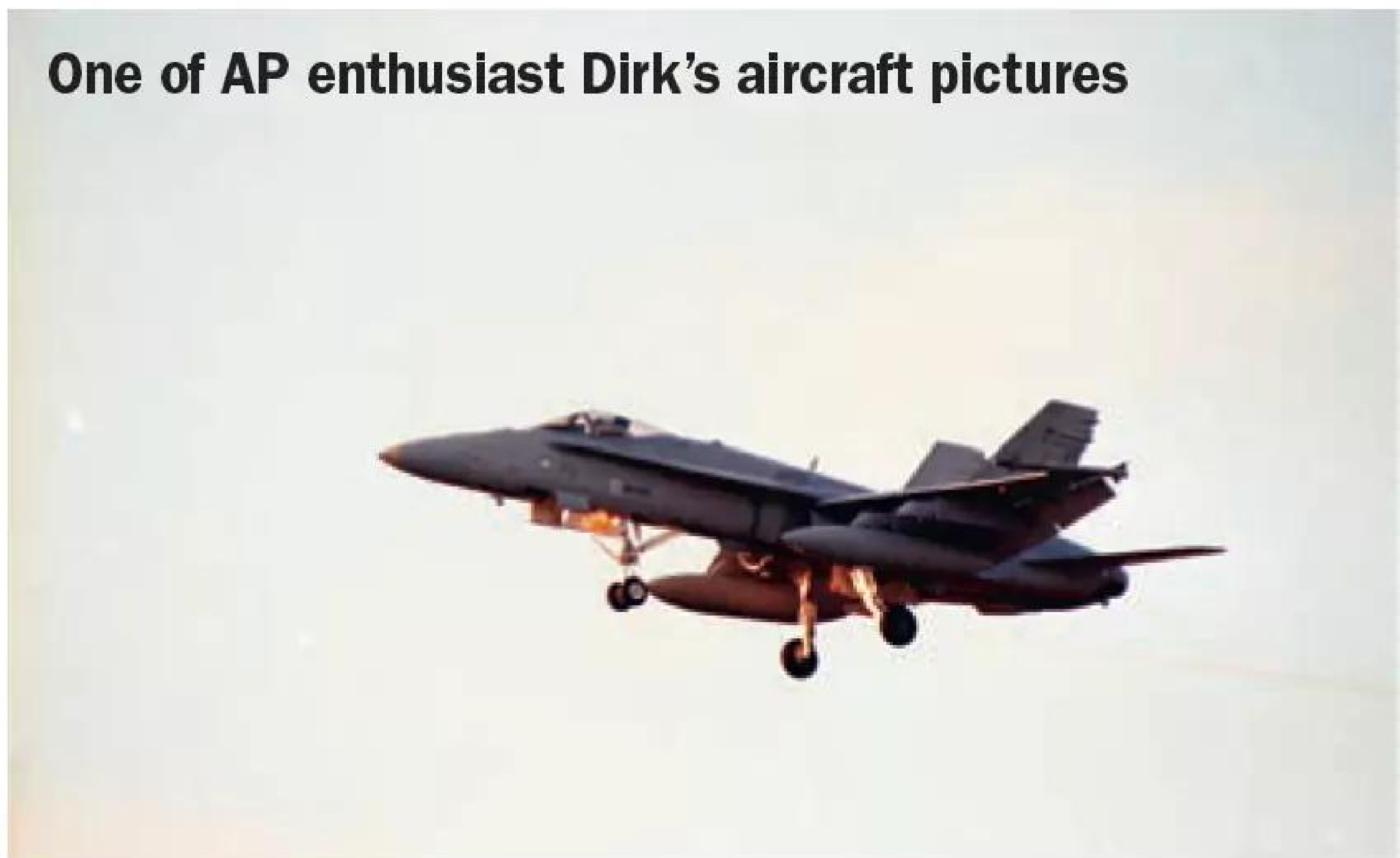
Going digital

After a long hiatus I have started photographing again with my camera, a Minolta Dynax 9 bought new in 1999. However, my results leave a lot to be desired, as my aircraft photo (below) shows, which was taken with a Minolta 300mm APO F4 lens. If a dark or light aircraft is against a light background I over-expose by one stop because I think details such as markings will not be clearly visible – but as you can see, this gives a very grainy and washed-out result. I'm not sure if the camera still functions properly after 26 years and two drops on the floor and I was thinking of going digital but what would you recommend, considering that I mostly photograph aircraft? **Dirk C W Stigter**

As you already have a nice Minolta 300mm F4 APO, you could get a second-hand Sony A-mount camera such as an A99 II and keep on using it. Or possibly go for an E-mount Sony and use the lens via the LA-EA5 adapter, which supports screw-drive autofocus lenses. The precise model would depend on your budget but as a guide you can still buy the Sony A7 III from 2018 brand new, for under £1,000.

Too much automation

Horror of horrors, I have read that the latest Google phones now have AI to tell you how to correctly compose the photo. This will no doubt lead to a world where we take out our smartphone and say 'take a photo' and the phone does everything else. So who should we credit future pictures to? The person holding the phone or Alexa, Siri?
Darren Marshall


One of AP enthusiast Dirk's aircraft pictures
© DIRK C.W.STIGTER

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THIS WEEK WE ASKED...

How do you back up your photos?

Kevin Oliver
Print them and store the negatives like a proper photographer. Voltage recordings get corrupted too easily so I stick with film.

Peter Curno
Working Lightroom with files on external HD which is then backed up to another external drive, which is then backed up to my NAS drive. New files from a new shoot are imported to Mac's internal drive initially, then moved to the external drive when done with edits.

Tracey Jackson @TraceyJacksonHI
Lightroom and cloud.

Michael Milner @milner_michael
External SSD and cloud.

Andy Clark
I save and process them on the SSD on my laptop. Once sorted and processed I then move them to another folder on my NAS. My NAS has 4x 16TB disks running in a RAID6 array, so the data is protected from up to two simultaneous disk failures. A failed disk can be hot-swapped.

John Cumberbatch
2 external HDDs. One master, one 'backup'. Backup gets backed up from the master once a month or so. If anyone knows of any freeware that will mirror the master to the backup, please let me know.

Jonathan Powell
Multiple local drives *and* cloud storage. The local backups are accessible and include version sets. But what happens if they are lost due to theft or destruction? That's where the cloud comes in. Also I would not trust cloud alone as it is not in my control.

Steve Walker
Mirror pictures folder from laptop and PC (main photo repository) to a NAS, Backblaze cloud backup for the PC.

Lee Ramsey
External drive & #smugmug.

Gary Burton
Put my negatives in sleeves in a folder.

Russ Dixon @RussDixonDOP
I use 2x WD drives for archiving and backing up, and then Amazon Photos as they offer unlimited cloud photo storage with Prime accounts. Surprisingly supports raw too, so backing up the whopping raw files from the GFX100s while out in the field was easy.

Share your photos and comments with us on social!
See page 3 for how to contact us

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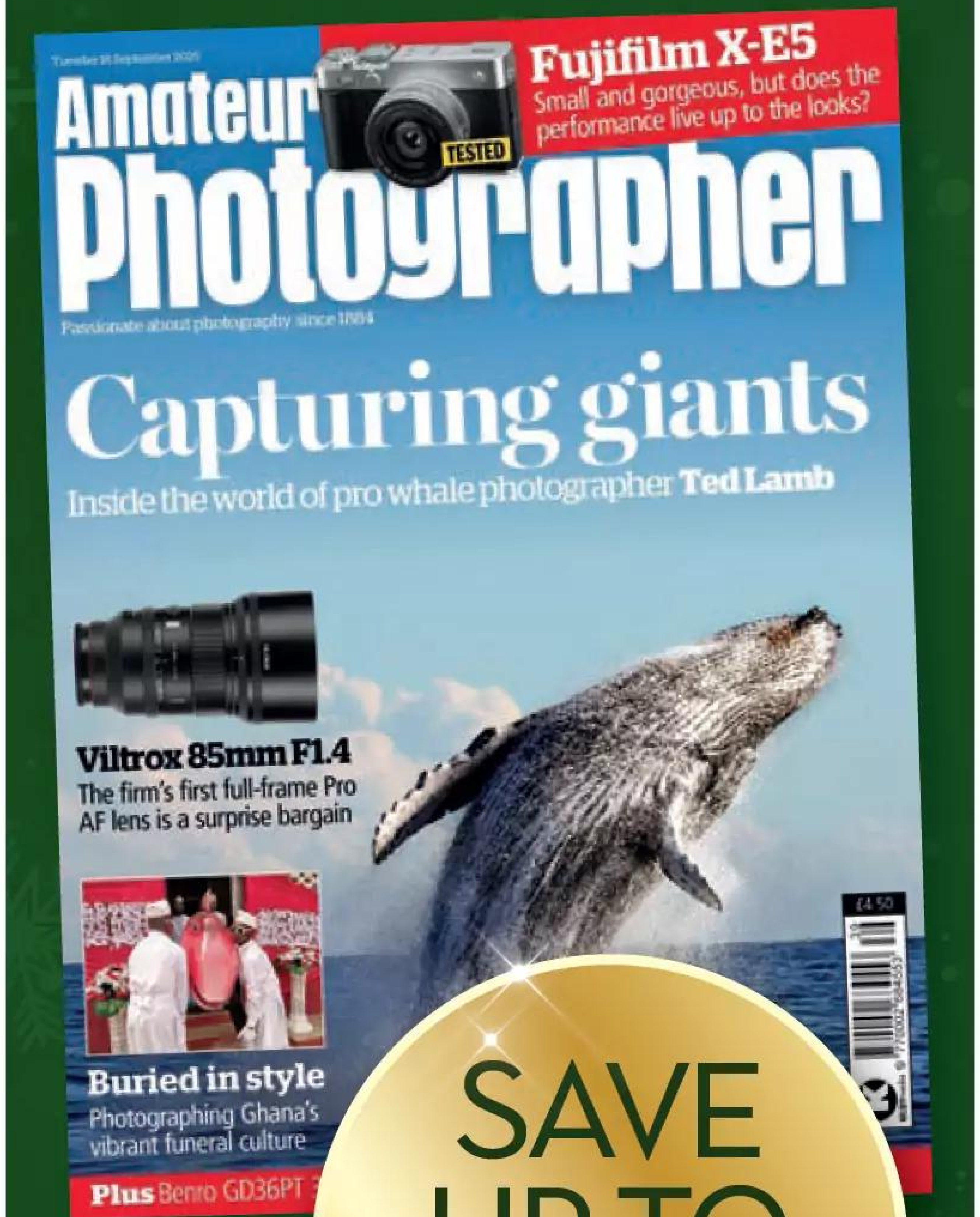
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1.4x III Extender	£479	£426	£349
2x III Extender	£469	£438	£359
16-35mm F2.8 L III USM	£2,399	£1,969	£1,489
16-35mm F4 L IS USM	£1,439	£989	£750
24-70mm F2.8 II L USM	£2,149	£1,899	£1,649
35mm F1.4 II L USM	£2,299	£2,169	£1,599
50mm F1.2 L USM	£1,699	£1,549	£1,099
70-200mm F2.8 III IS L USM	£2,199	£2,089	£1,849
100mm F2.8 L IS USM Macro	£1,249	£1,159	£989
Nikon - New Clearance			
20mm F1.8 S Z	£1,149	£1,069	£889
Sony - New Clearance			
A6500 + 16-70mm	£1,650	£1,449	£1,099
A7R IVa Body Only	£2,899	£2,899	£2,149
10-18mm F4 OSS E	£579	£579	£489
24-70mm F4 ZA T* ZA OSS	£749	£679	£649
24-70mm F2.8 G Master FE (	£1,599	£1,549	£1,489
24-70mm F2.8 G Master II	£1,899	£1,869	£1,729
50mm F1.8 OSS E Silver	£249	£249	£219
1.4x E Tele-converter	£479	£479	£429
Leica - New Clearance			
60mm F2.8 Asph Silver Apo Macro TL	£2,175	£1,995	£1,799
35mm F1.4 Asph M Chrome 6bit 11675	£5,100	£4,359	£3,799
Elpro S 180 16032	£850	£799	£649
50mm F0.95 Asph M Chrome 11667	£11,230	£9,960	£8,749
SL2-S Body Only 10880	£4,340	£3,348	£3,249
SL2 Body Only - Black 10854	£5,920	£3,989	£3,749
18-56mm F3.5-5.6 Asph T 11080	£1,400	£1,329	£1,099
180mm F3.5 CS Apo Elmar S 11053	£6,700	£3,700	£2,299
35mm F2.5 Asph Summarit S 11064	£5,600	£3,399	£1,989
90mm F1.5 Summilux Asph M Black 11678	£11,760	£10,369	£9,899
50mm F0.95 Asph M Black 11602	£11,030	£10,579	£9,989
Olympus - New Clearance			
25mm F1.8 Silver M.Zuiko Mk1	£399	£369	£249
25mm F1.8 Black M.Zuiko Mk1	£399	£369	£249
75-300mm II M.Zuiko	£549	£489	£349
9-18mm M.Zuiko Mk1	£599	£539	£439
12mm F2 ED M.Zuiko Silver	£749	£689	£519
75mm F1.8 ED M.Zuiko Silver	£899	£839	£599
Zeiss - New Clearance			
85mm F2.4 Loxia Sony E	£1,340	£1,099	£949
25mm F2.4 Loxia Sony E	£1,249	£1,179	£1,049
50mm F2 Loxia Sony E	£800	£729	£649

	RRP	Normal	BF PRICE
25mm F2 Batis Sony E	£1,300	£1,099	£949
85mm F1.8 Batis Sony E	£1,199	£969	£859
18mm F2.8 Batis Sony E	£1,400	£1,099	£829
135mm F2.8 Batis Sony E	£1,600	£1,249	£1,199
40mm F2 Batis Sony E	£1,300	£1,099	£1,049
135mm F2 Apo Canon ZE	£1,499	£949	£849
28mm F2 T* Canon ZE	£1,299	£899	£699
Slik Tripods & Heads- New Clearance			
PRO AL-323BH4 Compact Tripod	£179	£149	£99
GX Mini Tripod	£99	£49	£29
CF522 Lite + SBH-180DS Head	£249	£199	£149
Video Sprint III Tripod + Head	£179	£149	£99
Sprint Pro III BHAC Tripod + B/S	£149	£99	£79
PBH-635AC Ball Head	£119	£59	£49
SBH-200DQ Compact Ball Head	£89	£79	£49
SBH-200DS Compact Ball Head	£99	£79	£59
Samyang Lenses - New Clearance			
7.5mm F3.5 UMC Fisheye Silver - M4/3rds	£299	£225	£179
50mm F1.4 AS UMC - Sony FE	£339	£289	£259
14mm F2.8 AF - Sony FE	£609	£455	£379
50mm F1.4 AF – Sony FE	£479	£429	£389
7.5mm F3.5 UMC Fisheye Black - M4/3rds	£299	£225	£179
Lens Station for AF Lenses - Sony E	£59	£49	£35
24mm F2.8 AF - Sony FE	£269	£199	£179
35mm F1.4 AF - Sony FE	£529	£399	£339
45mm F1.8 AF - Sony FE	£359	£249	£199
85mm F1.4 AF - Sony FE	£539	£479	£389
10mm F3.5 XP EF - Canon EOS	£939	£789	£589
12mm F2 NCS CS Black - Sony E	£335	£269	£249
Other - New Clearance			
Keks KM02 Light Meter - Chrome	£149	£129	£99
Giottos 55mm UV Digital Filter MC	£29	£15	£5
Kenko 55mm Circular polariser	£49	£25	£19
Kenko 55mm Skylight Digital	£34	£10	£8
Kenko 55mm UV Digital	£34	£14	£9
Kenko 62mm Skylight MC	£29	£14	£10
Kenko 58mm Circular Polariser Slim	£39	£29	£15
Hoya 58mm Fusion Circular Polariser Slim	£79	£29	£19
Hoya 58mm Pro-1 Protector	£49	£29	£15
Hoya 58mm Pro-1 UV	£49	£29	£15
Hoya 72mm Skylight HMC	£46	£29	£17
Hoya 67mm Circular Polariser UXII	£44	£39	£29
Hoya 62mm UV Fusion	£39	£29	£25
Hoya 72mm UV UVII	£34	£29	£19

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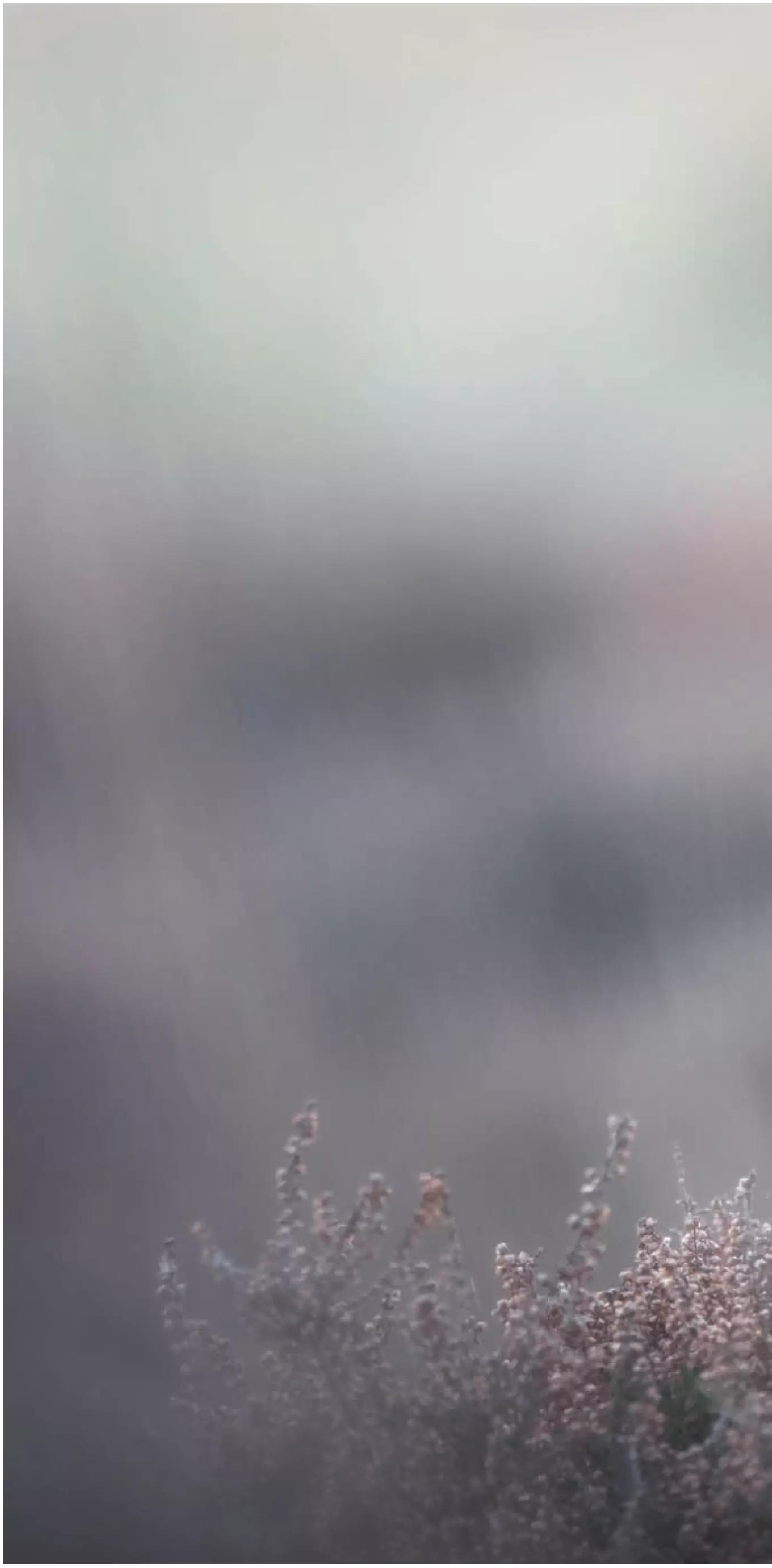


Hidden in Plain Sight
by Daniel Twiss

Sony A7 IV, Sony 200-600mm f/5.6-6.3, 1/1000sec at f/6.3, ISO 1600, 600mm

'I nearly didn't go out to photograph that day, but this moment made it worthwhile. A red grouse peeked through the heather, perfectly blending with the soft tones of the moor. The gentle light, muted colours, and the bird's calm presence created a peaceful, unexpected reward.'

Instagram: @d.a.n.i.e.l_t.w.i.s.s

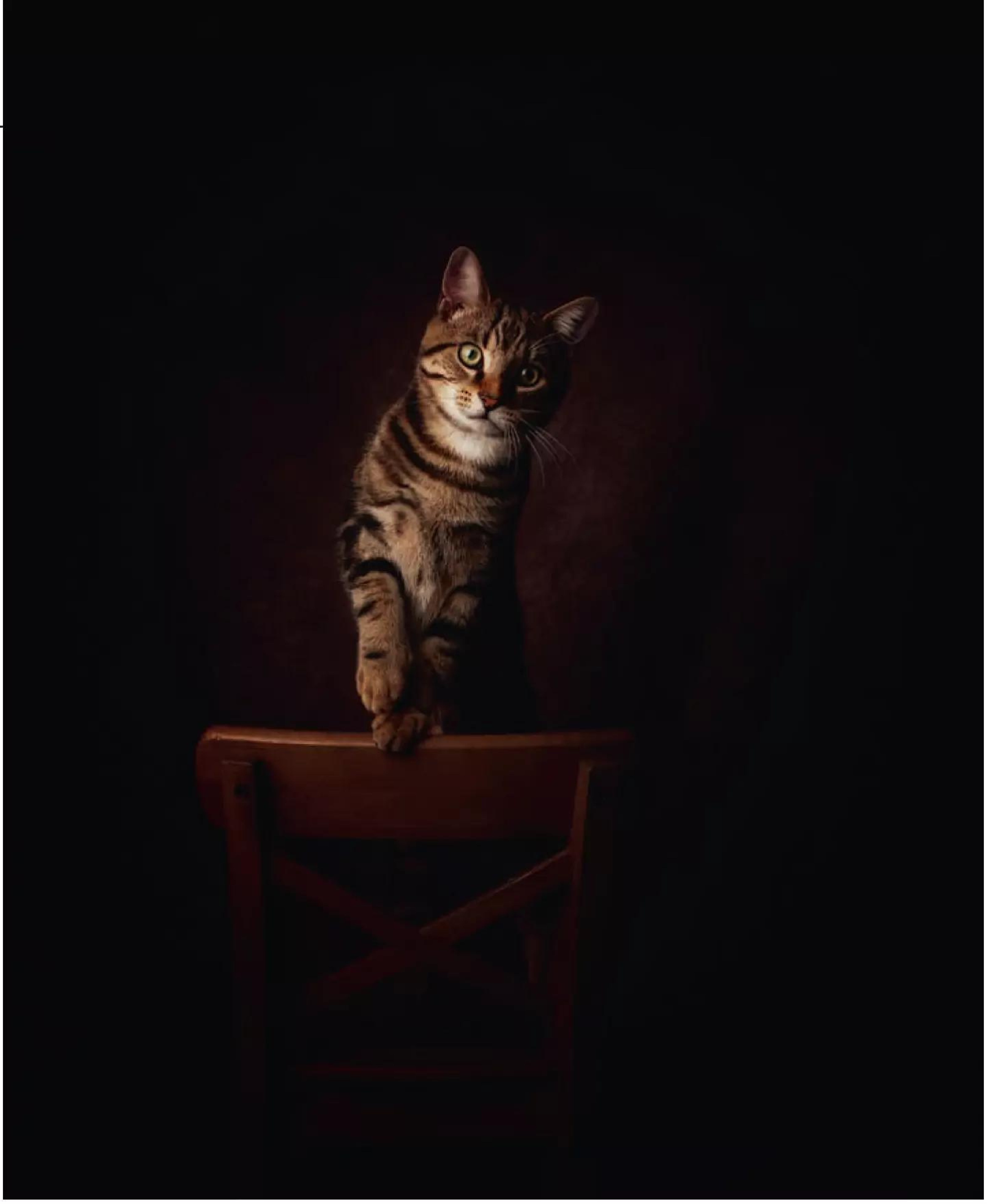
It's good to share

Painting Fur and Light by Justine O'Sullivan

Nikon Z6III, Sigma Art 35mm f/1.4, 1/160sec at f/9, ISO 100

'This portrait of my cat was taken using Elinchrom studio lighting (one D-Lite RX 4) and a Nikon Speedlight SB-910 to create a painterly effect. I wanted to highlight the texture of the fur and the cat's expressive eyes while maintaining a moody, classic atmosphere reminiscent of Old Master paintings.'

Instagram: @justine_osullivan_photos



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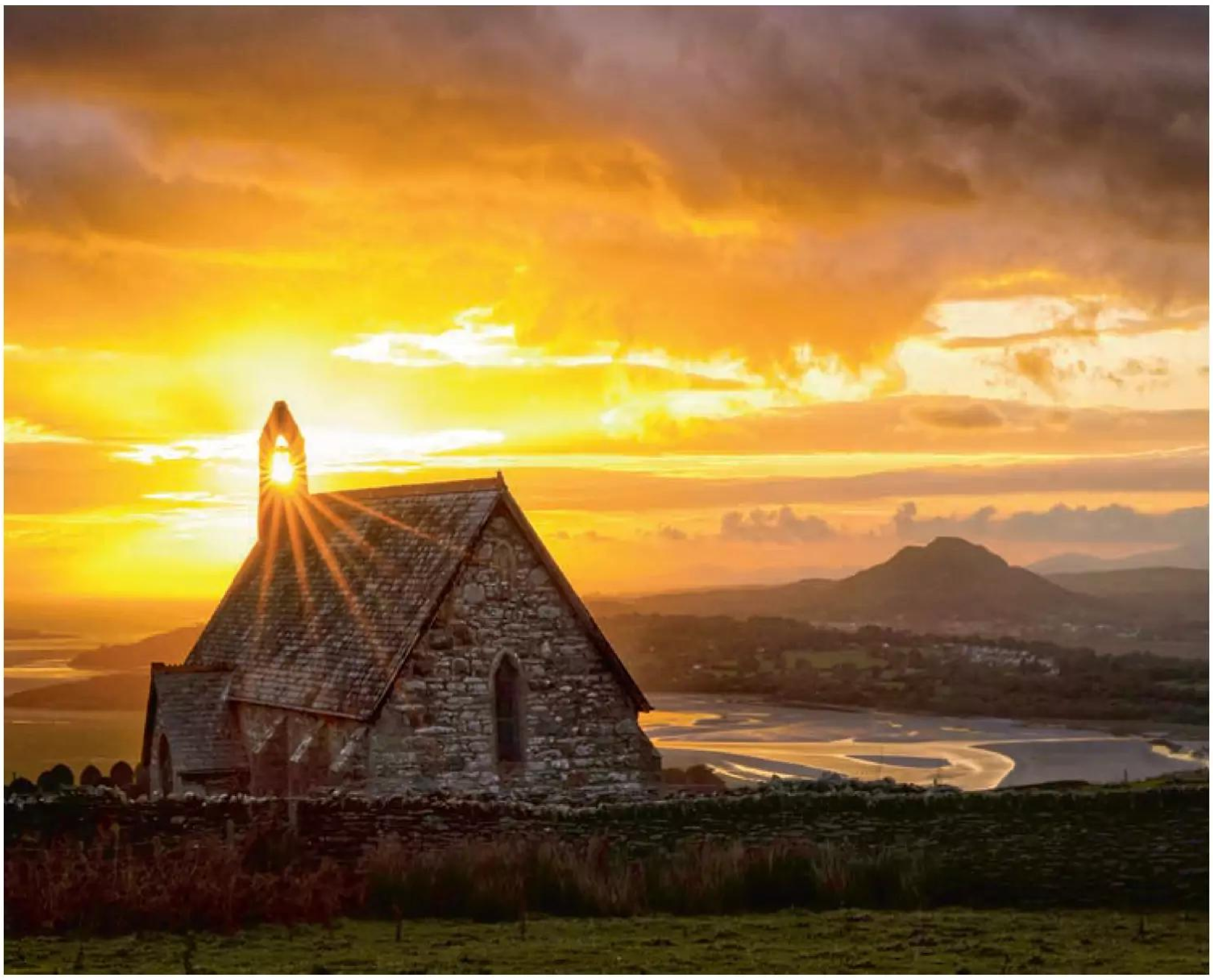

Heaven's Beacon by Ruth Davies

Sony A7R III, Sigma 50mm F1.4 Art, 1/50sec at f/16, ISO 250

'This image of St Tecwyn's Church captures a fleeting moment along the Welsh coast, where the evening sun broke through dramatic clouds and ignited the church steeple in light – symbolising the meeting of land, sea and sky. A brief, luminous moment that might otherwise have passed unseen.'

Instagram: @ruth.davies.5268

Want to see your pictures here? Simply share them with our Instagram or Facebook communities using the hashtag **#appicoftheweek**. Or you can email your best shot to us at **ap.ed@kelsey.co.uk**. See page 3 for how to find us.

Black Friday ticket sale starts 27/11/25
Bit.ly/fopblackfridaysale

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1

1 **On the Beach by Elaine Pratt**

2 **Cool Under Pressure by Stuart Anderton**

3 **One Moonlit Night at Godafoss by Jonathan Jelfs**

2

3

Join the Club

This friendly Somerset group are at all skill levels, and focus on a love of taking pictures, not kit

When was the club founded?
Focus On Photography was founded in 2018.

What does your club offer to new members?
Anyone wanting to join our club is assured of a very warm welcome – our first questions to them are more likely to be about how long photography has been their hobby, the genres they enjoy and what do they love about taking photos, rather than what gear they have! We really don't mind if they don't have a camera and take all their pictures on a mobile phone. The common interest is photography itself, rather than equipment used. Some members are at the very beginning of their journey, and some are extremely experienced professionals. We've been the official photographers of Priddy Folk Festival for a few years now and have recently started photographing at Wookey Hole, so there are some great opportunities for members to be a part of these local events and try something new. Our members' expertise cover a wide range of photography genres, including astro, vintage/racing cars, macro, ICM, aviation, landscape, travel, concert and infra-red. The main aim is for us all to gain knowledge from each other, make friends and above all to have fun!

Describe a typical club meeting
Firstly, a quick round-up of club news and notices, then usually it's the 'My Favourite Shot' slot where a member will showcase a photograph they've taken that they're particularly pleased with or which means something special to them. If we have a guest speaker, they would usually be up next, or we might have a practical session, such as still-life photography, followed by a nice long coffee break where people have a good chance to chat and catch up. We might then

have a short 20-minute learning session where we'll watch a video on a topic such as composition or an editing technique. We then have another regular spot called 'Photographer Spotlight' where we'll pick a famous photographer and learn a brief history of their life and work. We always end with a banner competition vote – each month we pick a theme and members can submit two photographs, with the winner having theirs as the Facebook page and website cover photo for that month. The meetings are what might be described as 'magazine' style, so there's usually something for everyone. We try to keep it mixed and flowing, with 'bite size' sections rather than three hours on one topic.

Do you invite guest speakers?
Yes, absolutely! We've had many speakers, mainly Somerset-based, such as Michelle Cowbourne (Visions of Somerset) who takes amazing photos of Glastonbury Tor, Sam Binding, a Bristol-based award-winning landscape photographer, Simon Williams (Old Parson), who experiments with antique gear to produce totally different results to today's digital age, and Josh Dury, a well-known astrophotographer, whose photos have been picked up by NASA. He gave a really fascinating, enthusiastic talk and is still an active member of the club today. Our own members with special interests have also given presentations, for example on automobile photography, event photography, macro, and videography, to name a few! Any guest speaker who presents to our club receives free membership for a year.

Do members compete in regional or national competitions?
Some members do enter competitions but we have taken a conscious decision not to compete as a club.

How many members do you have?
Approximately 45.

Are any residential trips or outings planned?
We've had a couple of day trips out, for example to the Imberbus Day in Salisbury, and the Hawk Conservancy in Andover. We also arrange meets locally, such as at Wells Cathedral, the Saturday market or Bishop's Palace moat. We then share our photos in an album. We have also just had our first summer 'Picnic in the Park' for members and their partners, which was a great social event, and we always have an excellent Christmas meal at a local restaurant, which everyone really looks forward to.

Do you have any funny stories about the club?
Phil Broek leads most of our meetings and he always peppers them with lots of dad jokes which certainly keeps everything light-hearted! He also once waxed lyrical for ten minutes over a rain cover that he'd bought to protect his camera, but when he opened it to show us, it resembled a flimsy sandwich bag. 'Oh!' he said. 'I've spent £10 on a plastic bag, haven't I!?' which did make us all giggle.

And we once had a lady barge into the room when a guest speaker was in full swing, making everyone jump. 'Can I get in the cupboard?' she asked in a haughty voice.

To which Phil replied breezily, 'It's only small! – can you fit??'

What are the club's goals for the future?
We are excited to be planning our first exhibition in December for family, friends and the public to come along and see our best work, the aim being to make this an annual event to round up the year. We also intend to organise some more trips out, and more meet-ups outside of our regular monthly meeting.

Mainly, it's always a great pleasure when someone renews their membership for another year as it means they've enjoyed their time with the club. The ultimate goal therefore is to continue keeping our meetings interesting and informative, listening to member feedback, and most importantly, retaining the friendly atmosphere of the club. Oh, and to restrict Phil's dad jokes to no more than five per meeting! AP

Club essentials

Focus On Photography

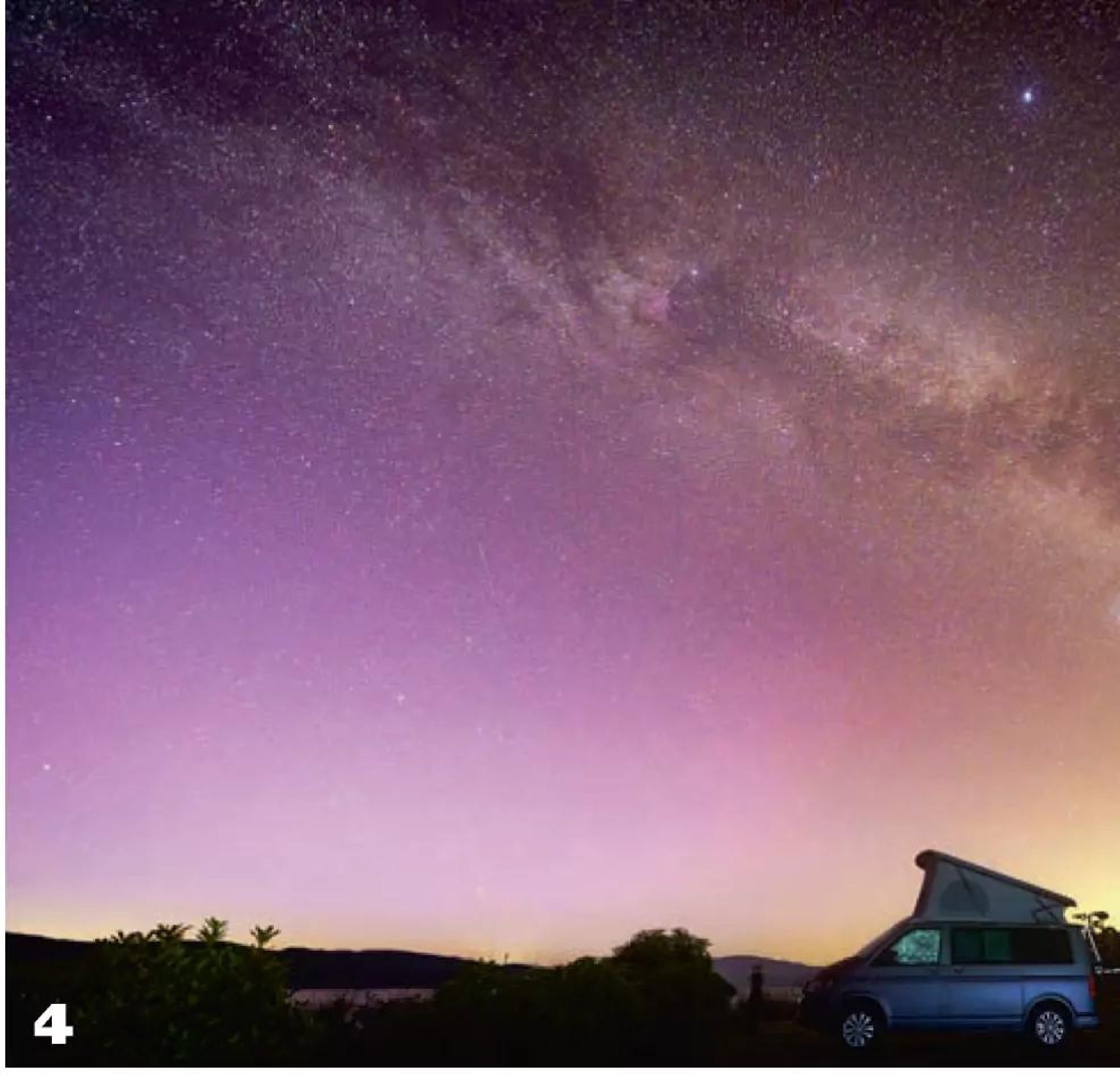
Wells, Somerset

Meets: Monthly, on the third Saturday of every month, 9.00am until 12.00pm at The Portway Annexe, Wells

Membership: £40 per annum

Contact: Phil Broek

Website: www.focusonphotography.org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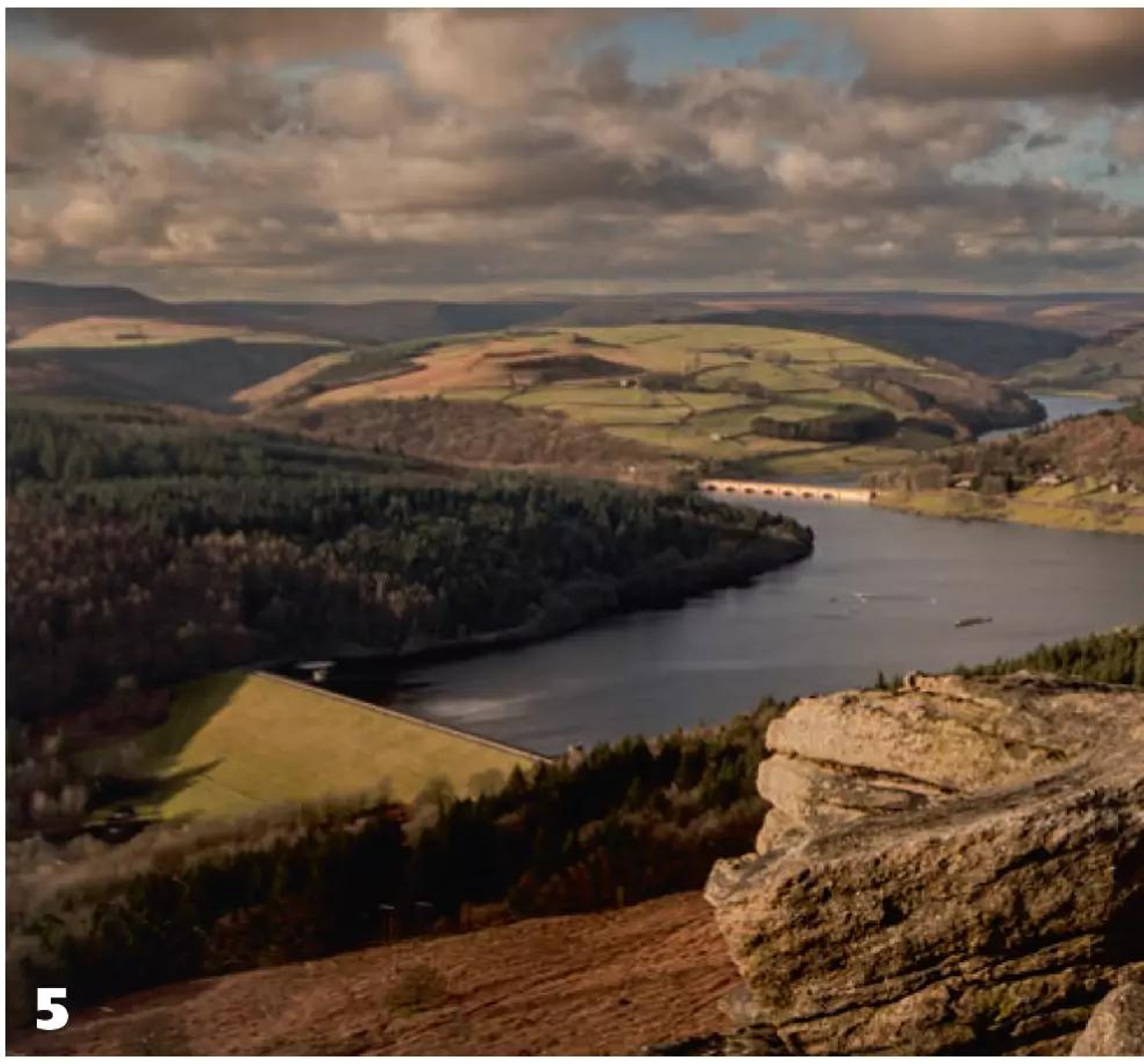
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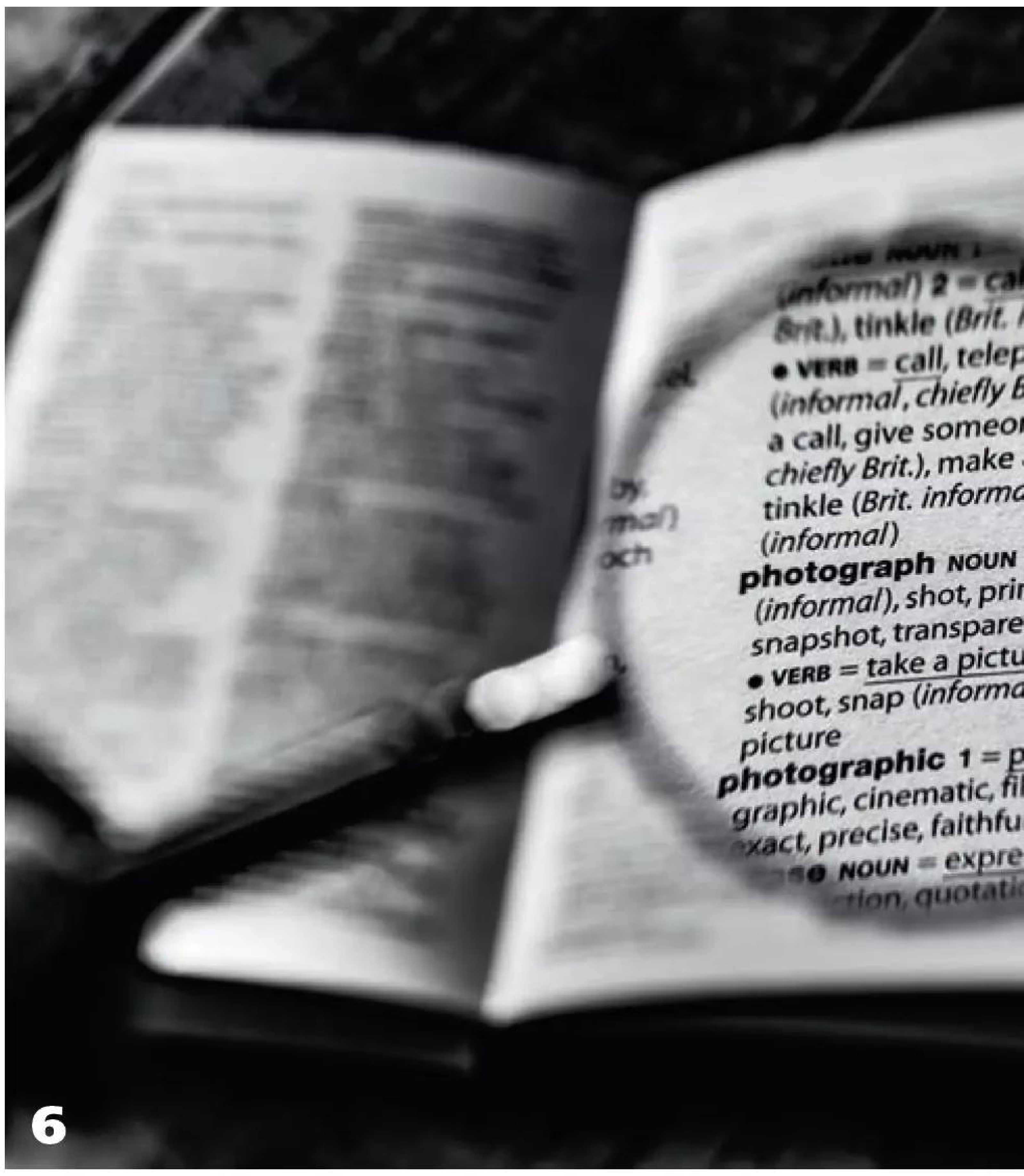

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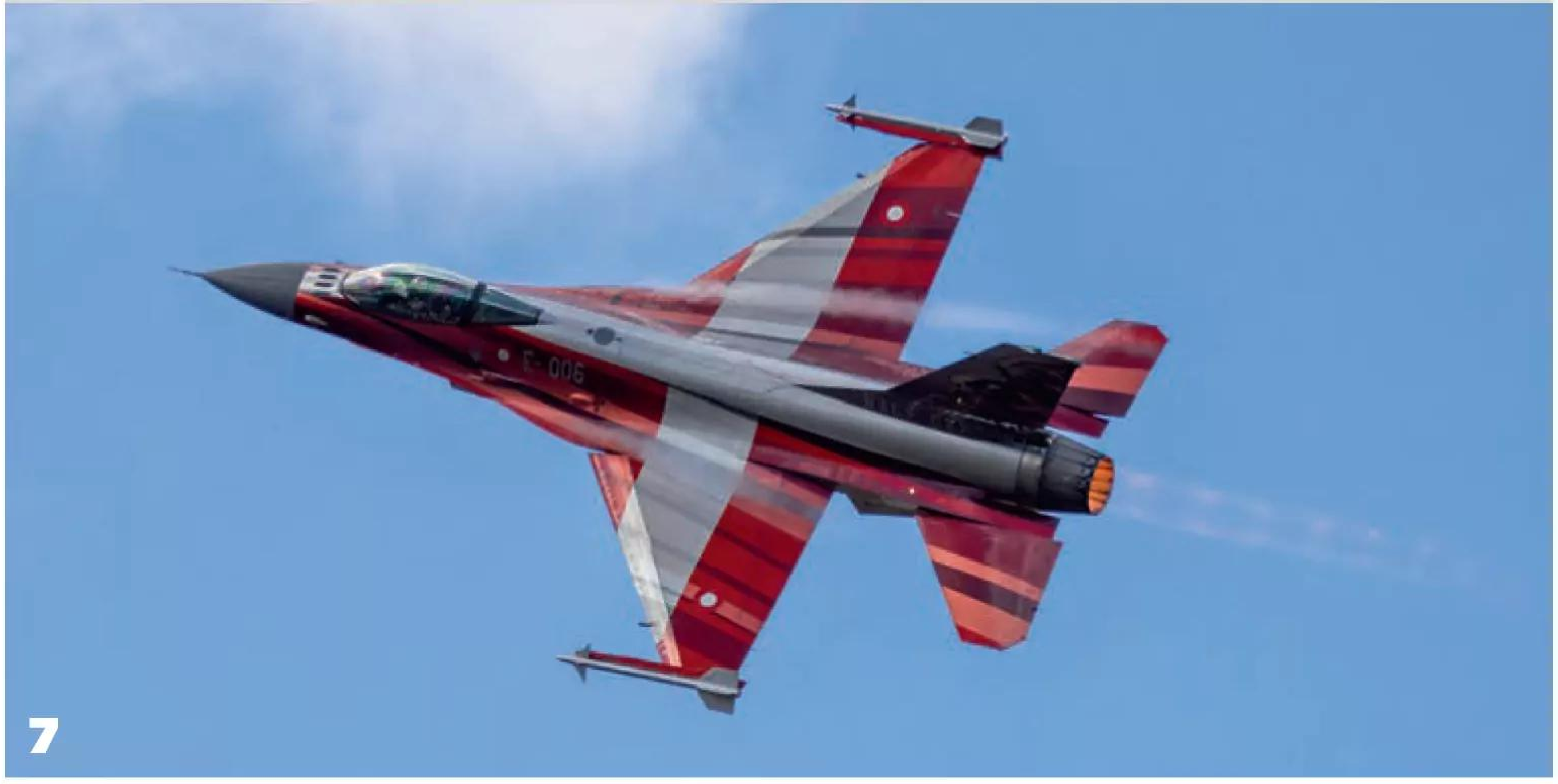

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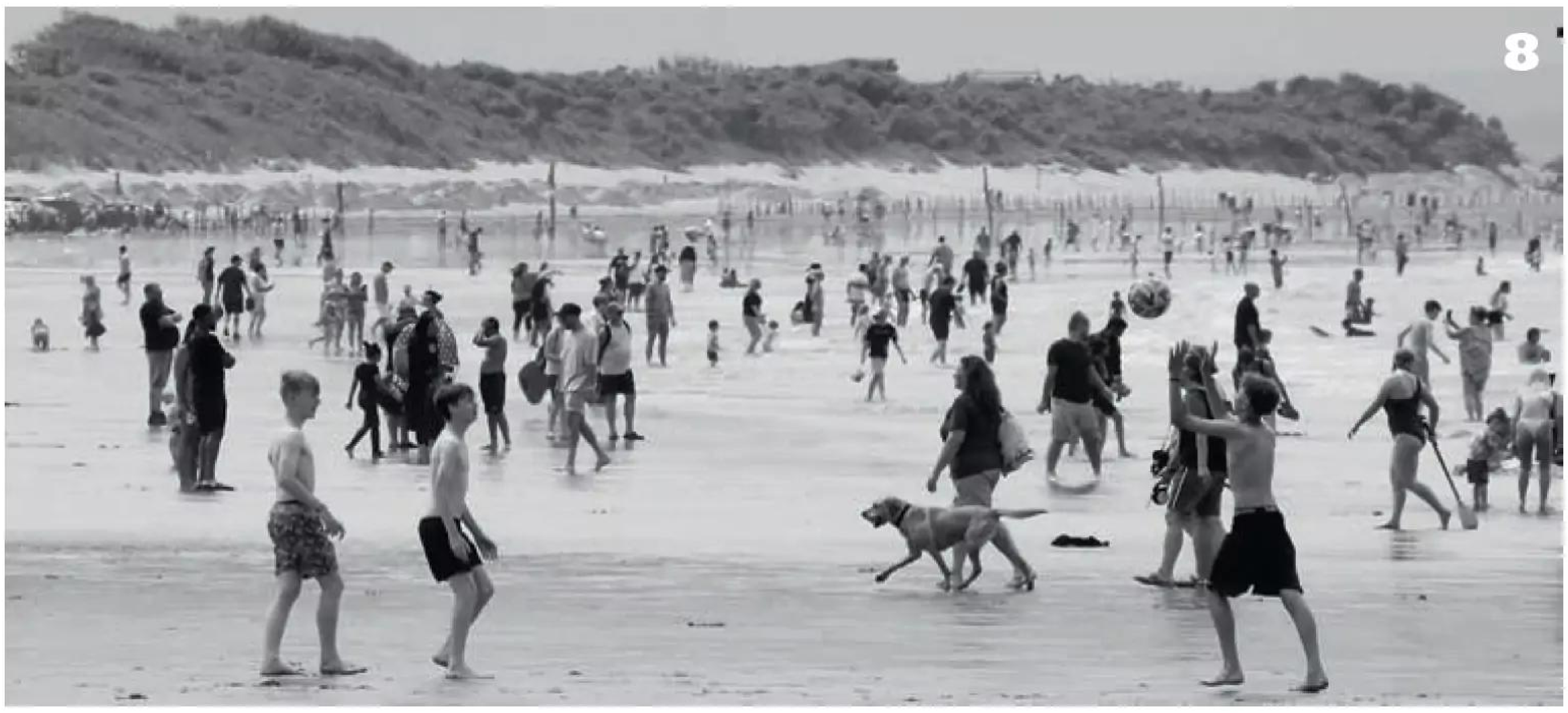


8

4 Chilled in Scotland by Steve Green

5 Adventure Awaits by Emma Kearley

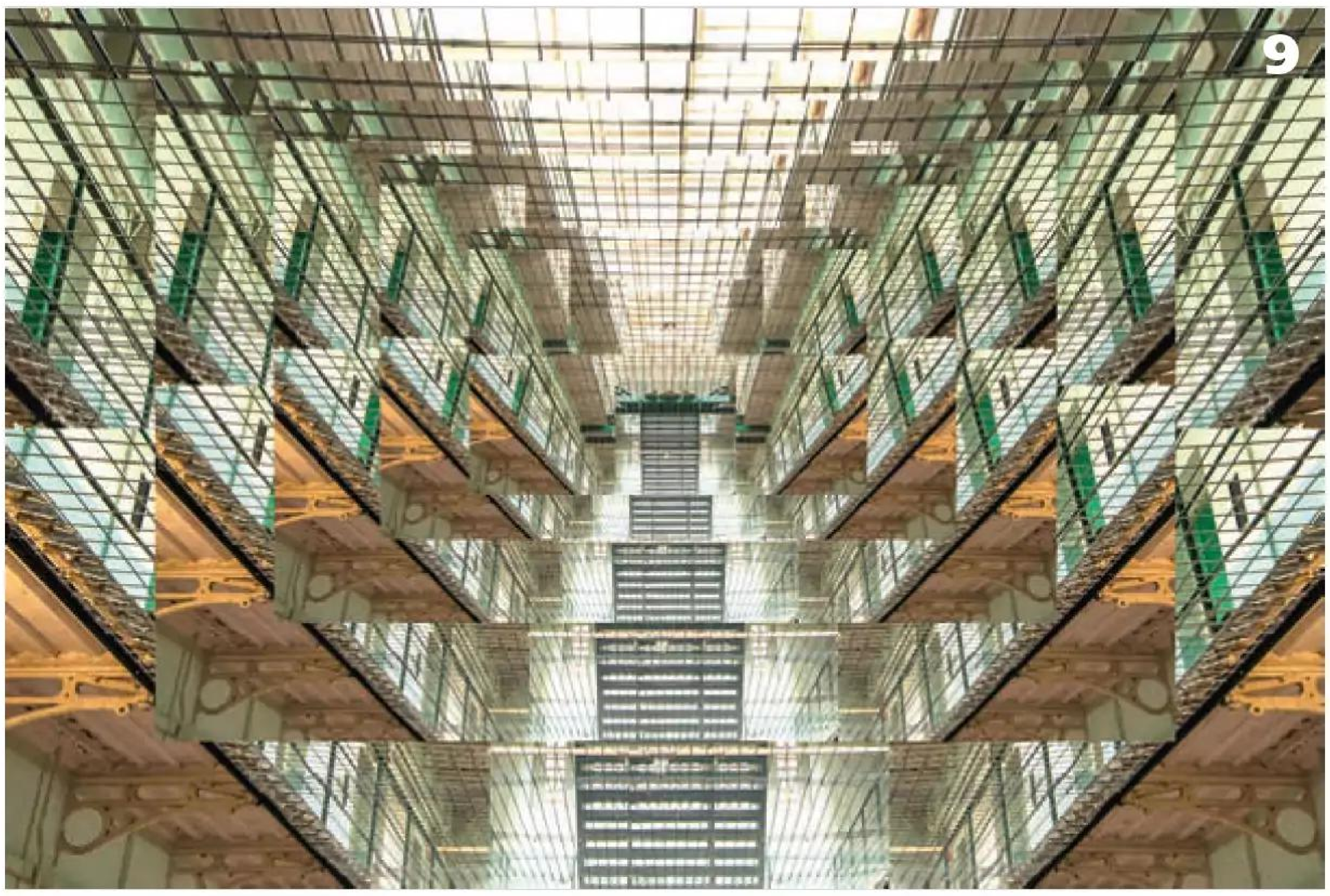
6 Focus On Photograph by Phil Broek

7 Red Steel Blue Sky by Claire West

8 Summer Haze by Lin Carullo

9 Incarceration by Fiona Humphreys

10 Lucky by Helen Jelfs



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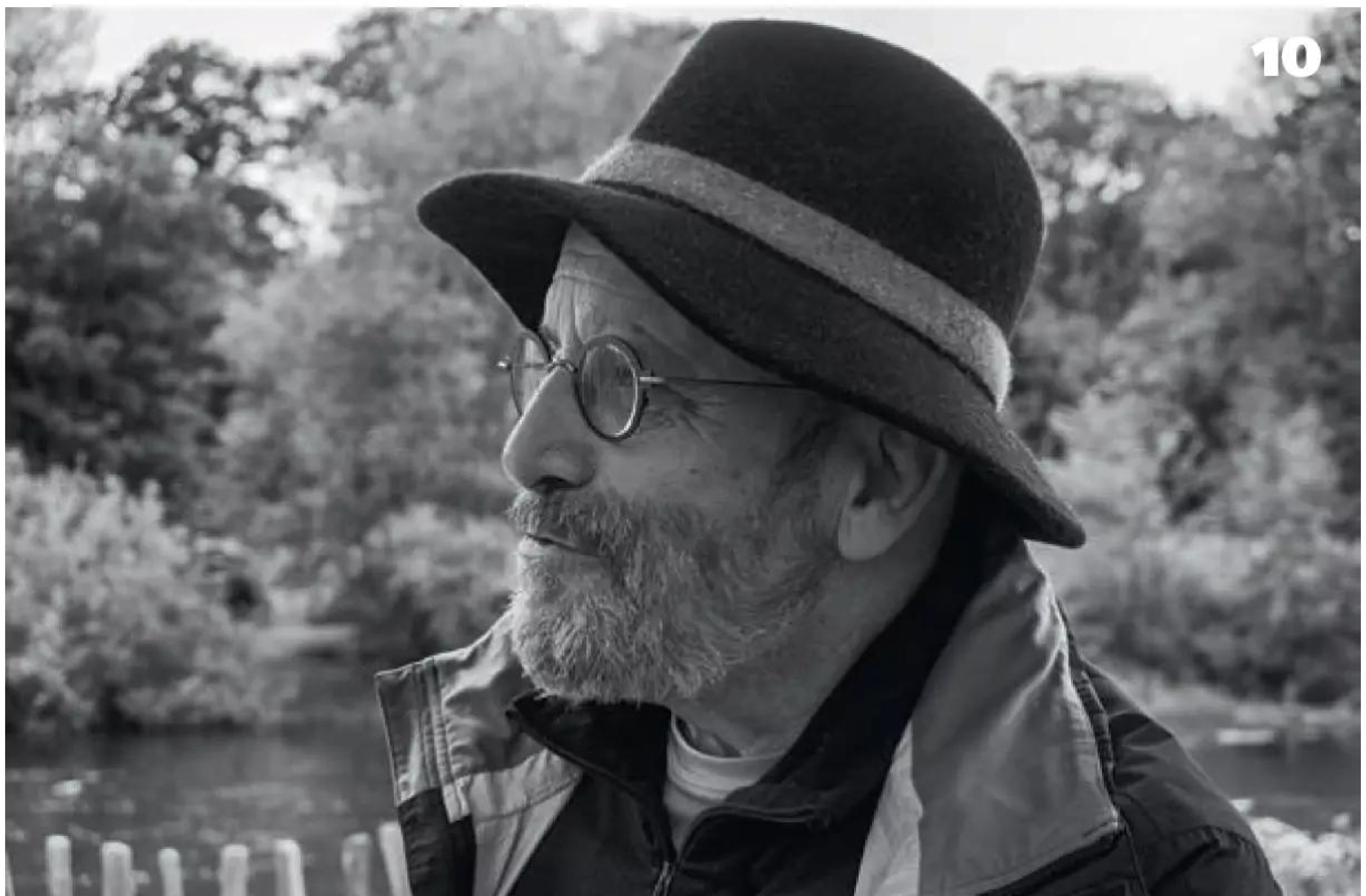

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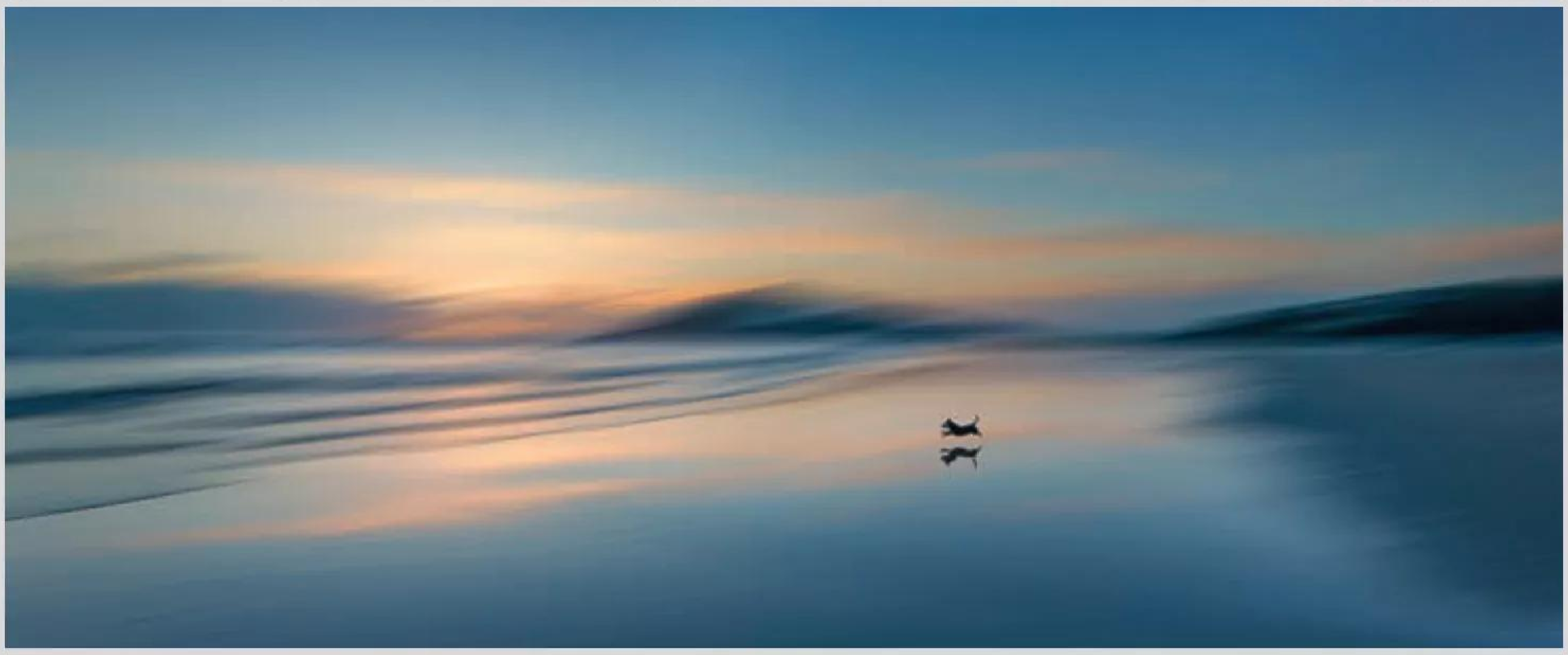

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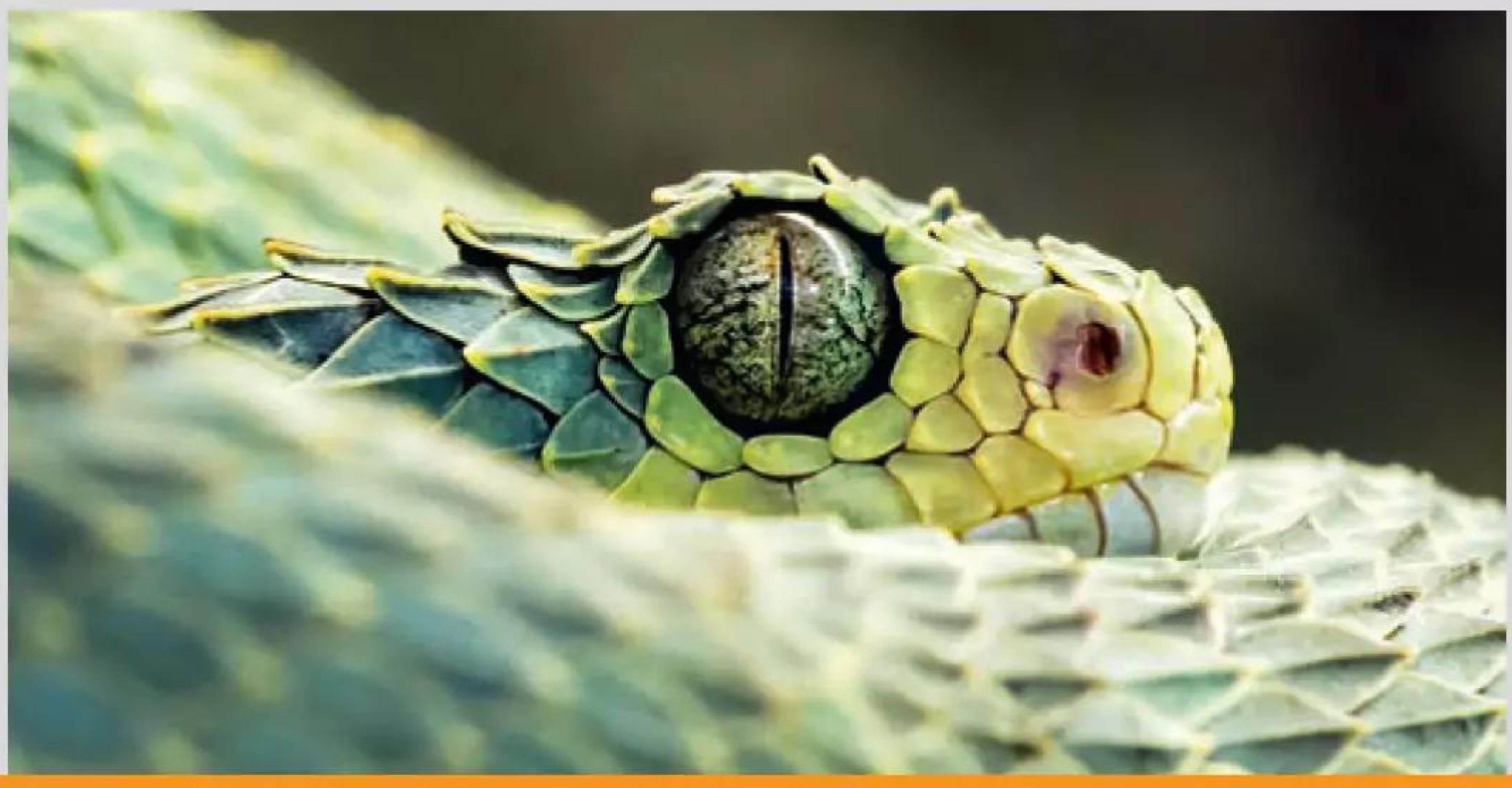

BOTTOM ROW, LEFT TO RIGHT: © ROY EGLOFF; © NEIL GRIEVE OF TRURO CAMERA CLUB; © ASHLEY FOUNTAIN

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Best Buys

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london camera exchange

A round-up of the AP testing team's favourite and most highly rated kit, including both cameras and all kinds of accessories, across a wide range of price points

OM System Tough TG-7

● £449 ● explore.omsystem.com

This latest model in a long line of class-leading rugged cameras is waterproof to 15m, shockproof against a 2.1m drop, crushproof and freezeproof. The 25-100mm equivalent lens is paired with a 12MP sensor, with in-body stabilisation to combat shake. Viewing is via a 3in LCD. The TG-7 is also one of the few cameras of its type that can record raw files.

★★★★☆ **Reviewed 2 Apr 2024**

Canon PowerShot G7 X Mark III

● £849 ● www.canon.co.uk

This lovely little pocket camera provides a good range of features for both photography and video. You get a 20MP 1in sensor, 24-100mm equivalent f/1.8-2.8 zoom lens, 4K 30p video recording, and a tilting rear screen. It's ideal for those who'd like more advanced controls than on a smartphone.

★★★★☆ **Reviewed 28 Sep 2019**

Fujifilm X100VI

● £1,599 ● www.fujifilm.eu/uk

The sixth version of Fujifilm's charismatic rangefinder-styled compact boasts a 40MP APS-C sensor in front of its fixed 23mm f/2 lens. It also gains in-body stabilisation while barely increasing in size. Traditional analogue control dials are joined by a unique hybrid optical/electronic viewfinder and a tilting touchscreen on the back. It's a truly fabulous camera.

★★★★★

Reviewed 9 Apr 2024

Ricoh GR III

● £949 ● ricohgr.eu/en-gb

A favourite of street photographers, the GR III combines a 24MP APS-C sensor and a sharp 28mm equivalent f/2.8 lens in a slim, pocketable body. It offers sensitivities up to ISO 102,400 and 4fps shooting, while in-body image stabilisation helps keeps image sharp. Viewing is via a fixed 3in rear LCD or an optional optical viewfinder that slots onto the hot shoe.

★★★★☆

Reviewed 3 Aug 2019

Sony RX100 VII

● £1,050 ● www.sony.co.uk

Sony has somehow crammed a 24-200mm equivalent zoom, pop-up electronic viewfinder, tilting screen, 20 fps shooting and 4K video recording into a body that you can slip into a jacket pocket. With the firm's latest AF technology also on board, it's without doubt the most accomplished pocket camera on the market.

★★★★½

Reviewed 5 Oct 2019

Sony RX10 IV

● £1,500 ● www.sony.co.uk

This sets a new standard for superzoom cameras, with a 24-600mm equivalent lens, 20MP 1in sensor, and 24 fps continuous shooting. Its SLR-shaped body hosts a large electronic viewfinder and a decent set of physical controls. It's the best all-in-one camera for wildlife or travel photography that you can buy right now.

★★★★★

Reviewed 2 Dec 2017

Canon EOS 250D

● £650 with 18-55mm IS lens ● www.canon.co.uk

One of the smallest DSLRs around, the EOS 250D strikes a great balance between portability and usability. It's equipped with a novice-friendly Guided Mode, while Canon's Dual Pixel CMOS sensor provides excellent autofocus in live view. Image quality is very good, delivering vibrant colours and plenty of fine detail.

★★★★½

Reviewed
7 Sep 2019

Olympus OM-D E-M10 Mark IV

● £749 with 14-42mm ● explore.omsystem.com

With a charismatic retro design, fine handling, highly effective in-body stabilisation and attractive JPEG output, Olympus has made a camera that's more pleasant to use than its entry-level competitors. Its 20MP sensor delivers good results up to ISO 3200 at least, and its tilting screen can be set to face forwards beneath the camera.

★★★★½

Reviewed
26 Sep
2020

Fujifilm X-T5

● £1,699 body only ● www.fujifilm.eu/uk

Fujifilm's latest X-T model is a great choice for serious enthusiast photographers. It boasts a 40MP APS-C sensor housed in a retro-styled body covered with traditional analogue control dials. Subject-detection autofocus, in-body stabilisation and Fujifilm's lovely colour modes round off an extremely desirable package.

★★★★★

Reviewed
3 Jan 2023

Canon EOS R50

● £899 with 15-45mm lens ● www.canon.co.uk

With the EOS R50, Canon has fitted some impressive technology into a compact and lightweight body. It boasts highly capable subject recognition autofocus coupled with rapid continuous shooting. Image quality is very pleasing too, with attractive files direct from the camera. It also works well with EF-mount DSLR lenses.

★★★★½

Reviewed
6 Jun 2023

Fujifilm X-T30 II

● £899 with 15-45mm lens ● www.fujifilm.eu/uk

This lovely little camera provides excellent performance, while preserving the charm and charisma of the X-series. It's a great all-rounder, and handles exceptionally well thanks to an intuitive interface based around traditional analogue dials. Image quality is superb in both raw and JPEG, aided by Fujifilm's peerless Film Simulation modes.

★★★★★

Reviewed
8 Feb 2022

Panasonic Lumix GH7

● £1,999 body only ● www.panasonic.com/uk

Panasonic's flagship Micro Four Thirds camera is aimed at videographers, but holds its own when capturing stills as well. Its 25MP sensor delivers plenty of detail, while enabling 5.7K recording at 60fps, or 4K at 120fps. Autofocus is much improved over the firm's older models, too. Pro-spec video functionality and effective in-body stabilisation round off a fine package.

★★★★★

Reviewed
5 Nov 2024

Fujifilm X-S20

● £1,249 body only ● www.fujifilm.eu/uk

Styled like a mini DSLR, the X-S20 uses electronic dials for changing exposure settings, as opposed to the X-T series' analogue controls. But you still get Fujifilm's signature fine image quality, along with in-body image stabilisation. It also boasts an array of advanced video features, making it a great choice for vloggers and photographers alike.

★★★★★

Reviewed
25 Jul 2023

Panasonic Lumix G9 II

● £1,699 body only ● www.panasonic.com/uk

Panasonic's high-end Micro Four Thirds camera provides an impressive set of features. It can shoot 25MP still images at up to 75fps, and 5.7K video at 60fps. You get an excellent control layout, incredibly effective in-body stabilisation, and very capable subject recognition autofocus. A good range of small, excellent Leica-branded lenses is available to match.

★★★★★

Reviewed
31 Oct 2023

OM System OM-1 Mark II

● £2,199 body only ● explore.omsystem.com

Updated version of this high-speed powerhouse gains some handy new features. It's capable of shooting at 120fps with focus fixed, or 50fps with AF, but now with double the buffer for extended bursts. AI subject detection recognises vehicles, animals and birds. It also boasts IP53-rated weather-sealing and includes class-leading stabilisation.

★★★★★

Review
12 Mar 2024

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London Camera Exchange
PHOTOGRAPHER OF THE YEAR 26

Nikon Z6III

● £2,499 body only ● www.nikon.co.uk

This mid-range model is one of the finest all-round cameras for enthusiast users on the market. It marries excellent autofocus and super-fast continuous shooting with solid build quality and a refined control layout. The viewfinder is particularly bright, and joined by a fully articulated touchscreen. It's at least a match for any other camera in its class.

★★★★★

Reviewed
8 Oct 2024

Sony Alpha 7 IV

● £2,399 body only ● www.sony.co.uk

Sony's latest enthusiast-focused full-frame mirrorless model sets a new standard in its class. Its 33MP full-frame sensor delivers excellent image quality, and it can shoot at up to 10fps. Its practically foolproof subject-detection AF can now recognise birds as well as humans and animals. A large, clear viewfinder and fully articulated touchscreen round off the package.

★★★★★

Reviewed
11 Dec 2021

Nikon D780

● £1,999 body only ● www.nikon.co.uk

This highly accomplished 24MP full-frame model shows that there's life in the DSLR yet. It's superbly built with extensive weather sealing, handles brilliantly, and gives excellent results in any conditions. It'll provide top-level service to photographers who want to keep using their F-mount lenses and still prefer an optical viewfinder.

★★★★★

Reviewed
4 Apr 2020

Nikon Z 7II

● £2,499 body only ● www.nikon.co.uk

Nikon has delivered a sensible update to its flagship high-res model, with an additional SD card slot and slightly faster shooting. As before, its 45.7MP sensor gives stunning image quality, backed up by 5-axis in-body image stabilisation and fast, accurate autofocus. The viewfinder is superb, and F-mount SLR lenses can be used via the FTZ adapter.

★★★★½

Reviewed
6 Feb 2021

Nikon Z 9

● £5,299 body only ● www.nikon.co.uk

Without doubt Nikon's finest camera yet, the Z 9 combines high resolution, breathtaking speed, subject-recognition autofocus and pro-level build. It's capable of shooting 45.7MP raw files at 20fps for 1,000 frames, and 11MP JPEGs at 120fps. It can also record 8K video. With its superb viewfinder and tilting rear screen, it's probably the most capable camera around.

★★★★★

Reviewed
22 Mar 2022

Canon EOS R6 Mark II

● £1,999 body only ● www.canon.co.uk

Based around a 24MP full-frame sensor, this brilliant all-rounder will do almost anything you might ask it to. It combines reliable subject-detection AF, rapid continuous shooting, and effective image stabilisation in a body that handles well and gives great results. It also works well with adapted EF-mount DSLR lenses.

★★★★★

Reviewed
21 Mar 2023

Sony Alpha 7R V

● £3,999 body only ● www.sony.co.uk

With its 61MP full-frame sensor, the A7R V provides class-leading image quality while adding a whole array of improvements over its predecessor. These include subject-detection AF, a larger, more detailed viewfinder, and a more flexible rear LCD design. For those whose needs are more about image quality than speed, it's probably the best full-frame camera you can buy.

★★★★★

Reviewed
17 Jan 2023

Leica M11 Monochrom

● £8,300 body only ● uk.leica-camera.com

Within its own specialist niche, this monochrome-only manual-focus rangefinder is almost perfect. Its build quality is stunning, and the pared-back design allows you to immerse yourself completely in the process of taking pictures. Most importantly, the 60.1MP sensor produces fantastic results, reaching a new pinnacle in black & white image quality.

★★★★★

Reviewed
16 May 2023

Fujifilm GFX100 II

● £6,999 body only ● www.fujifilm.eu/uk

Fujifilm's latest super-high resolution medium-format camera places an updated 102MP sensor in a pro-spec modular body. Subject-detection autofocus is on board for animals, birds and vehicles, while in-body image stabilisation helps keep handheld shots sharp. It's the ideal camera for serious photographers who demand the ultimate in image quality.

★★★★★

Reviewed
21 Nov 2023

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Tenba DNA 9 Slim Messenger

● £110 ● uk.tenba.com

If you'd like a small shoulder bag to carry a camera and a couple of lenses, this is among the best you'll find. Measuring 28cm wide by 20cm tall, it's well suited to holding a mirrorless camera or a compact DSLR. The quality of materials and construction is excellent, and there are plenty of handy pockets for organising accessories.

★★★★★ **Reviewed 26 Apr 2022**

Vanguard Veo Select 46BR

● £120 ● www.vanguardworld.co.uk

This backpack is capable of swallowing a substantial amount of kit while retaining a travel-friendly 28cm slim profile. An array of access points allow you to get at your kit from the back, top or either side. It's capable of holding a full-frame DSLR with 4-6 lenses along with a 13in laptop.

★★★★★

Reviewed
6 Jul 2019

Wandrd Prvke 31

● £279 (photography bundle) ● eu.wandrd.com

This spacious backpack offers an excellent combination of uncluttered style, rugged construction and a selection of genuinely useful pockets. The roll-close top section is the icing on the cake that always seems to allow just one more item to be squeezed in. Crucially, it's comfortable to carry over long distances.

★★★★★ **Reviewed**
11 Sep 2021

NiSi NM-180 Macro Rail

● £105 ● www.nisioptics.co.uk

Arguably the best macro focusing rail available right now, the NM-180 combines excellent quality build with super-smooth operation. It's easily capable of supporting a full-frame SLR while offering up to 130mm of travel, with a fold-out handle providing fine adjustment. It also boasts extensive compatibility with the Arca Swiss quick release system, with a dovetail profile along its base and a rotating clamp on top.

★★★★★

Reviewed
24 Oct 2020

Cullmann Rondo 460M RB8.5

● £75 ● www.transcontinenta.co.uk/cullmann

If you want a fully featured tripod kit on a budget, this is a great choice. Four-section aluminium legs provide a max height of 160cm, while packing down to 43.5cm. It's rated to support a 4kg load, weighs 1.46kg, and one leg can be combined with the centre column to form a monopod.

★★★★½

Reviewed
21 Mar 2020

MeFOTO RoadTrip PRO

● £225 ● uk.benroeu.com

Few tripods come close to matching this one for sheer versatility. It extends to 152.5cm, folds down to 38.5cm and weighs 1.37kg. One leg can be detached for use as a monopod or boom arm, and there's even a small desktop stand stowed inside the centre column. It's sturdy enough to support a full-frame mirrorless set-up.

★★★★★

Reviewed 12 Apr 2022

Benro Rhino 24C tripod with VX25 head

● £250 ● uk.benroeu.com

Benro has got pretty much everything right with this sturdy, well-designed tripod and head that'll support a substantial load. This four-section carbon fibre model offers a maximum height of almost 1.7m, while folding down to 49cm and weighing 1.74kg. It's easily capable of supporting a full-frame DSLR with a telephoto zoom. Quite simply, it's a fantastic kit for the money.

★★★★★ **Reviewed**
28 Nov 2020

NiSi True Color ND-Vario 1-5 stops

● £89-£189 ● www.nisioptics.co.uk

This high-quality variable neutral density filter is ideal for regulating the amount of light entering your lens, without introducing any colour cast. It's optically excellent, boasts an oil and water-repellent coating, and includes a handy and accurate density scale. It's available in sizes from 40.5mm to 95mm.

★★★★★

Reviewed
24 May 2022

Benro SupaDupa Pro MSDPL46C

● £190 ● uk.benroeu.com

It may have a ridiculous name, but this five-section carbon fibre model might just be the best monopod we've ever tested. One clip leg lock provides easy length adjustment, while the lower twist locks are waterproof. On the top there's a clever bowl head with an Arca-compatible clamp. It's a great choice for those who regularly shoot with large telephotos.

★★★★★

Reviewed 24 Apr 2021

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London Camera Exchange
PHOTOGRAPHER OF THE YEAR 26

Nissin i40

● £159 ● www.kenro.co.uk

A compact flashgun that's designed for mirrorless cameras, the i40 stands out for its high specification, compact size and ease of use. Its auto-zoom head covers lenses from 24-105mm equivalent. With a powerful output that belies its size, and a built-in LED video light, it's available for most brands of camera.

★★★★★

Reviewed
3 May 2014

RØDE Wireless Go II

● £309 ● en.rode.com

RØDE's compact wireless system makes it easier than ever to get high-quality audio for video recording. This dual-channel wireless mic kit includes two transmitter units and a receiver (a single-transmitter set is also available for £200).

Key features include built-in rechargeable batteries lasting up to 7 hours, onboard backup recording, and up to 200m range.

★★★★★

Reviewed
15 May 2021

Hahnel ProCube2

● £80 ● www.hahnel.ie

This dual battery charger boasts a sturdy metal shell and interchangeable plates that each accept a pair of batteries. An LCD display shows progress, and a 2.4A USB output allows phones or tablets to be charged once the camera batteries are full.

Versions are available for all the main camera brands.

★★★★★

Reviewed
24 Feb 2018

Datacolor SpyderX Pro

● £159 ● www.datacolor.com

If you like to post-process your images, you need to be sure that your monitor is showing colours accurately. Datacolor has designed the SpyderX to calibrate your display faster than ever before, with the process taking two minutes. For photographers the Pro package makes most sense.

about
most
datacolor
Spyder X

★★★★★

Reviewed 6 Apr 2019

Rotolight NEO 3

● £549 (Ultimate Kit) ● www.rotolight.com

LED lighting technology has advanced in leaps and bounds over recent years. Rotolight's compact on-camera NEO 3 offers a unique feature set thanks to its full colour RGBWW LEDs, with the ability to provide either continuous light or flash in 16.7 million colours. This firm has also programmed in the characteristics of 2,500 colour filters. Power is provided by an NP-F type Li-ion battery.

★★★★½

Reviewed
5 Apr 2022

Hoya Ultra-Pro Circular Polariser

● £47-£179 ● www.holdan.co.uk

Hoya's premium range of circular polarisers is available in 13 sizes from 37mm to 82mm. These filters feature 16 layers of anti-reflective coatings, high transmission, and are designed to repel water and oil while being scratch and stain resistant. An ultra-thin aluminium frame prevents vignetting when used with wideangle lenses.

HOYA
ULTRA-PRO
FILTER
CIR-PL
Water, Stain & Scratch Resistant

★★★★★

Reviewed
3 Mar 2018

Kase Wolverine K9 100mm Entry-Level Kit

● £385 ● www.kasefilters.com

With this top-quality filter system, Kase has carefully rethought every component. The slimline, low-profile holder benefits from extensive light-sealing, while the 82mm polariser clips into place magnetically; it's also easy to adjust from behind the camera. All of the filters use top-quality glass, and everything fits together into a single case. The result is a top-quality set-up that's easy to use and delivers superb results.

★★★★★

Reviewed
5 Dec 2020

Intrepid Compact Enlarger

● £280 ● www.intrepidcamera.co.uk

For film photography enthusiasts wishing to make prints at home, this compact and affordable unit includes lots of handy features. Based around full-colour LED technology, it supports both mono and colour printing. It's perfect for those who don't have space for a permanent darkroom.

★★★★★

Reviewed
17 Jul 2021

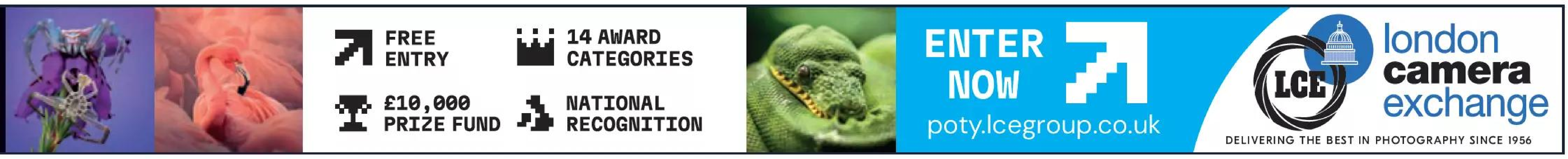
Fujifilm Instax Link WIDE

● £140 ● www.instax.co.uk

This brilliant portable printer produces great-looking 6x10cm prints on Fujifilm's Instax Wide film. It connects to your smartphone via Bluetooth and is controlled using an attractively designed and intuitive app. Powered by a built-in rechargeable battery and available in white or grey, it'll slip easily into a bag.

★★★★★

Reviewed
25 Jan 2022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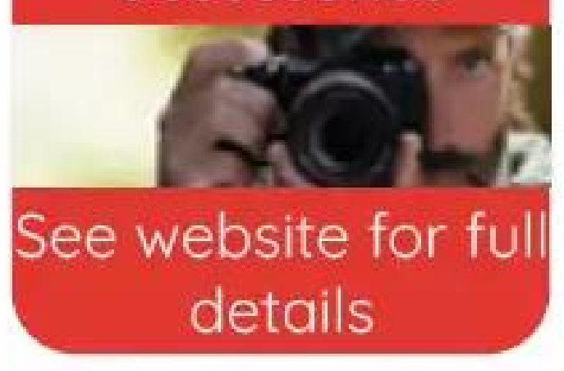

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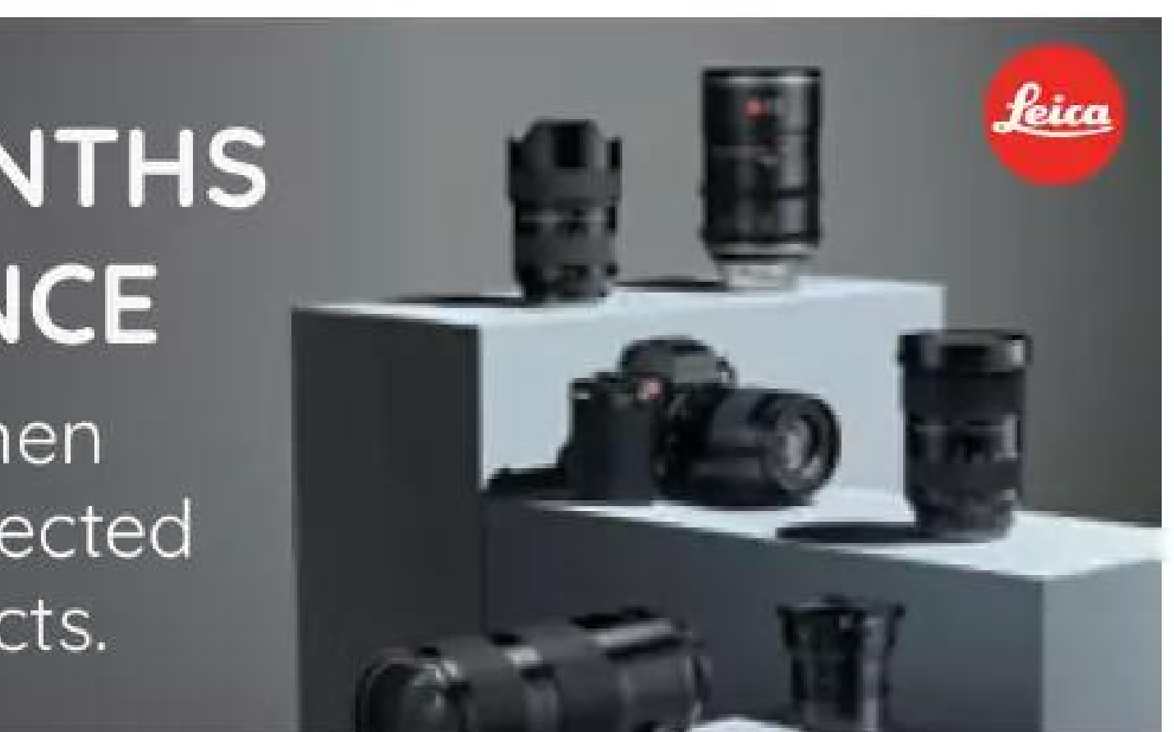

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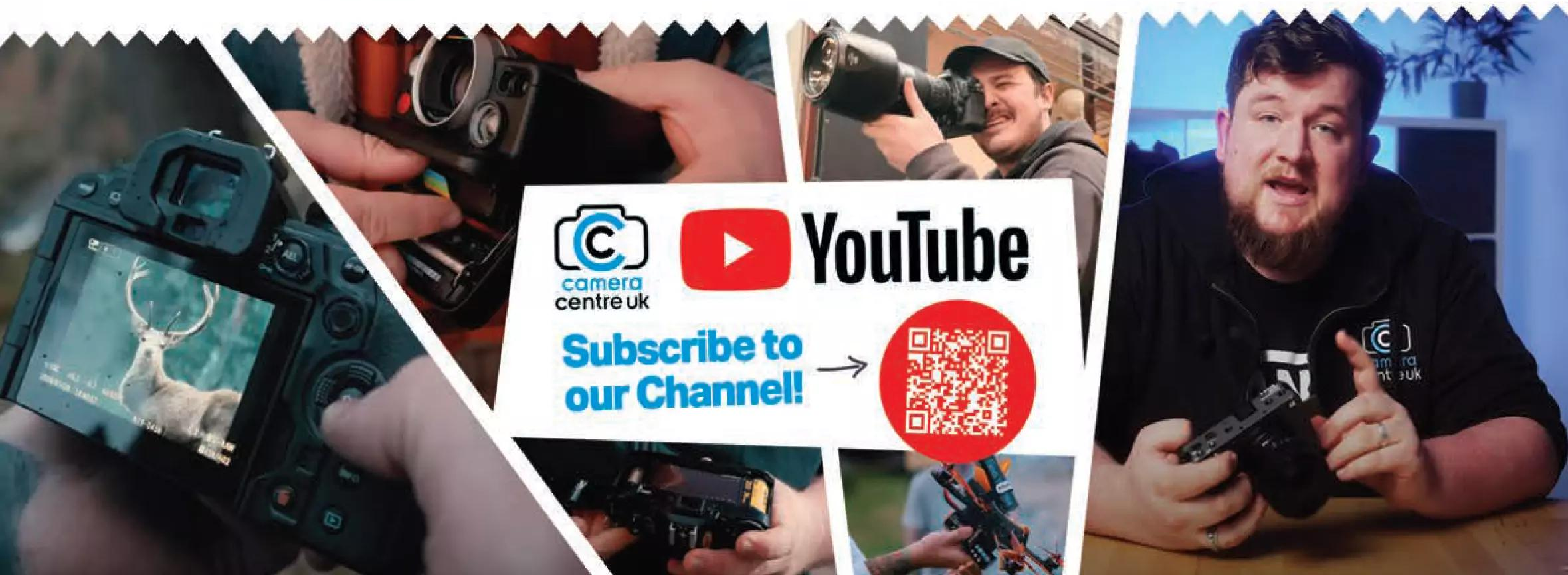

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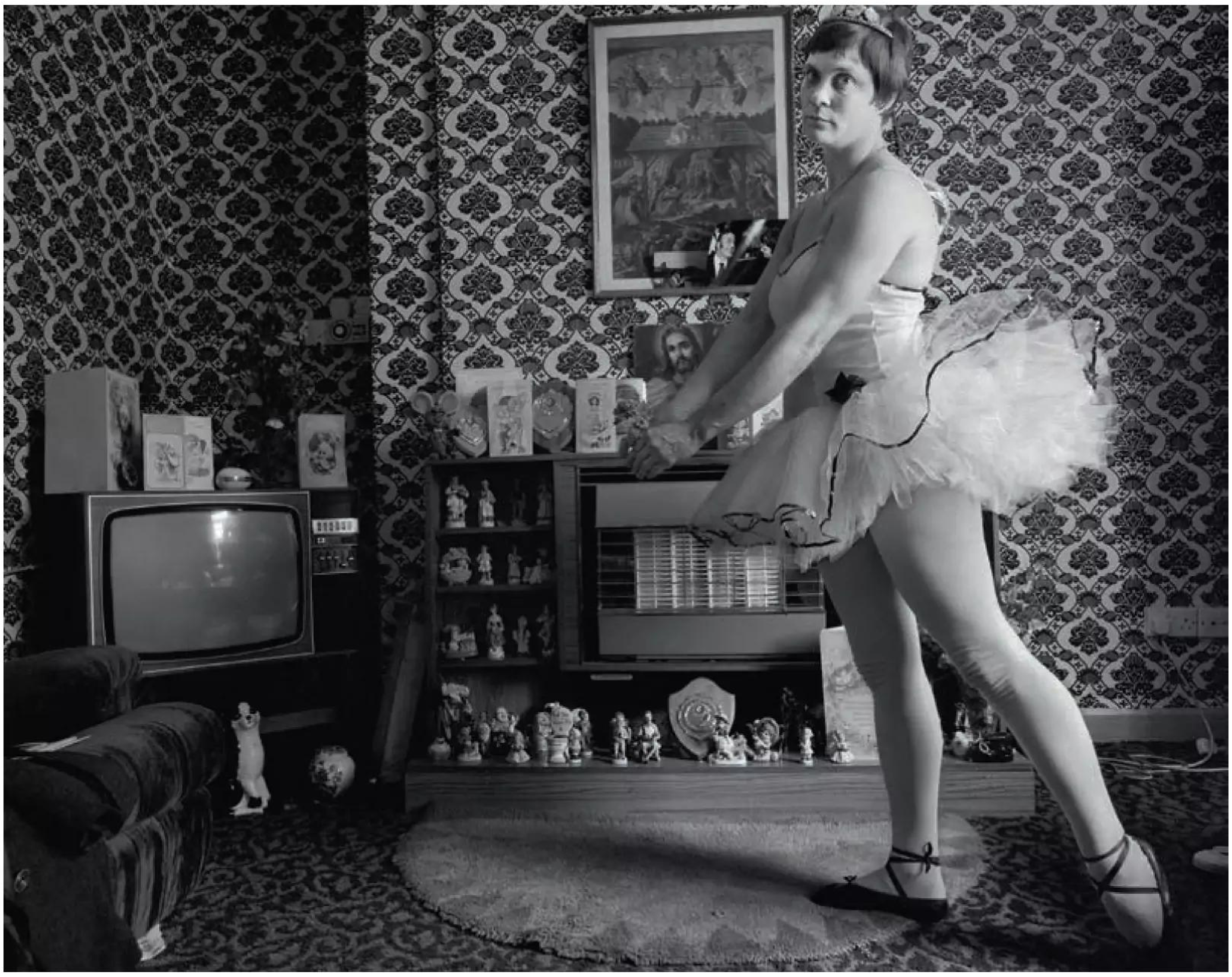
Final Analysis

Maria Falconer considers...

Margaret Bull, a dancer, 1982 by Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen



There is no denying that the dancer here does not fit the lithe stereotype of a classical ballerina. But before you go all Craig Revel Horwood on me, you should bear in mind that this picture isn't really about dancing. No, it just so happens that there is dancing in the picture.

To put the work in context, 'Margaret Bull, a dancer, 1982' is part of a project entitled Step by Step made by photographer and filmmaker Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen. Based at the Connell-Brown Dancing School in North Shields, the work started out as a film (*Keeping Time* by Amber Films), but on completion Sirkka-Liisa stayed on to make more stills.

Truthful and kind

Sirkka-Liisa is well known for her social documentary photography (you may be familiar with Byker, 1983), and it's clear from her work that she is drawn to, and curious about, people. Living and working in the north-east of England, Sirkka-Liisa's images portray life through a kind yet truthful lens. So, Step by Step isn't concerned with arabesques or pirouettes; it focuses on the female members of a small community in an economically deprived part of the world.

In1982 Sirkka-Liisa was interested in the developing relationships between mothers and daughters, and how intimate bonds could be forged between them. So, she immersed herself in this primarily female community where shared experiences played out against a backdrop of sequins and hairspray.

Dancing is an expensive pastime; lessons, exams, makeup, costumes and shows all cost money. Some families had more than one child to fund, and some mothers would also take dance lessons alongside their daughters.

As Sirkka-Liisa developed her own relationships within the dancing community the project expanded, and she photographed the girls and women in their homes and workplaces.

This brings me back to Margaret, our black & white ballerina in a 1980s frame. Powerful in her vulnerability, she holds her pose, and nerve for the camera; a defiant stare demands that we put aside our patronising preconceptions.

They say a picture speaks a thousand words, yet this one only tells half a story. You see hidden behind the ballet tights and tutu is a hard-working woman who needed 'a man's job and a man's wage' to bring up her two daughters. Margaret Bull was in fact the first female stoker and senior caretaker on Tyneside. Her parallel persona is revealed in a companion picture by Sirkka-Liisa here (sidegallery.co.uk/collection/step-by-step#gallery-28).

Margaret simply tells it as it is: 'When I've worked nine hours in the muck and the heat and the clart and the shit and shifted a ton and a half of coal. It's difficult for me to be graceful with my arms – but if you want to dance, you've got to throw yourself in it or not bother. It doesn't matter to me how idiotic I look in a tutu.'

I'm sure Margaret wouldn't have cared less what any judge had to say about her dancing, but when the scores are in, it's a ten from me.

Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen's work can be found at **sidegallery.co.uk/collections**. A newly revised edition of *Step by Step* will be published by Dewi Lewis in May 2026.

Maria Falconer MA, MSc., FRPS, is a photographic practitioner, teacher and writer. A Fellow of the Royal Photographic Society, Maria runs various photography workshops across the UK and in Europe. For more on her latest workshops and to book your place, visit **www.mariafalconer.co.uk**

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